

“They’re Tough, These Women!”: The Everyday Resistance of Aboriginal Women to  
Dehumanization by Government Agencies

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By

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## ABSTRACT

By way of a series of narrative oral histories, focus group and interviews with Aboriginal Elders, this thesis examines the everyday resistance of Aboriginal women to dehumanization by government agencies. The dehumanization of these Aboriginal women occurs when they are denied their basic human rights guaranteed in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Dehumanization is manifest as the denial of basic subsistence needs, poor treatment in the form of abuse, harassment and discrimination, and the denial of self-determination. Dehumanization is met with resistance in an attempt to restore humanity. Everyday forms of resistance are small acts of daily personal resistance which do not usually challenge the prevailing social order. They are based upon a complex subaltern ideology expressed in private transcripts which are usually hidden from the dominant group. Aboriginal women use the private transcripts as the ideological basis for at least three forms of everyday resistance: direct, indirect and hidden. With direct resistance the private transcript emerges, with indirect resistance a third-party mediates the emergence of partial private transcript and with hidden resistance the private transcript remains hidden. Aboriginal woman also base their resistance on a reciprocal relationship of empowerment between themselves and their communities which becomes more powerful as they age. The increase in the quality of the reciprocal community–individual empowerment leads to evolution in the quality of everyday resistance strategies, from relatively inefficient emotion-based reactions to more efficient and well-developed strategies.

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## Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, Alice Hogan, and all the Others Who Came Before:  
*My Heart is Your Drumbeat; My Life is Your Honour Song*

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## Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1985, Sandra Lovelace went to the United Nations and won her human rights case against the Canadian government. The United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled that a section 12.1.b of the *Indian Act* which stripped women of their status as Indian upon marriage to a non-status man violated the rights of Aboriginal women. This decision led to the development and passage of Bill C-31, an amendment to the *Indian Act*, which ostensibly ended gender discrimination in the Act. In 1990, the Six Nation Clan Mothers played an important role in the Oka Crisis which resulted in the creation of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. In 2002, the coroner inquest of Neil Stonechild, a young man who had died shortly after being last seen alive in police custody, was launched. His mother led tireless efforts to identify those responsible for her son's death and hold them accountable. These acts of resistance are the highly publicized forms of protest that most people associate with Aboriginal women's resistance.

These overt and direct forms of resistance by Aboriginal women are exceptional. Few women find themselves in the Supreme Court, or on resistance blockades or lobbying for coroners inquests. Instead, what we find are acts of resistance of another kind, those daily phenomena expressed in the everyday lives of Aboriginal women.

When I first moved to Saskatoon in 2002, I took my children to a municipal-run splash pool. Another Aboriginal woman was there with her two young children. A lifeguard asked one of her children to leave the water because pool rules state that children under the age of five were not allowed in the water without an adult. The mother confronted the lifeguard pointing to other young children in the water and protesting that her child was singled-out because of racial

prejudice. The lifeguards asked her leave the pool and she refused. They called the Saskatoon City Police. By the time the police arrived the conflict was over and the family was sitting quietly by their towels on the grass. I watched as two armed police officers escorted this bathing suit clad woman and her children from the park. For most Aboriginal women resistance is a day-to-day struggle against this form of dehumanization.

### **Positioning the Research**

Canada in 2008 is considered by many to be a post-colonial state, however, colonization has not ended for Aboriginal peoples. Colonial practices are ongoing in the form of neo-colonialism and manifestations of it continue to be found in federal, provincial, municipal and First Nations government institutions. Colonization began with the incursion of Europeans into a geographic territory already occupied by Aboriginal Peoples. With their technological developments, Europeans positioned themselves as the more powerful group, then proceeded to govern the original occupants by imposing their own laws, customs, language, and values. This has had a destructive long term effect on the existing social and cultural structures of the Aboriginal people who found themselves under external political control and economic dependence. In the long run and to a large degree, the colonizer replaced traditional Aboriginal social institutions with low quality governmental institutions and bureaucratic agencies in areas such as education, health, justice, social services and education.<sup>1</sup>

Neocolonial institutions and agencies are the remnants of colonial institutions. They arise from a system of hierarchies of power held by Eurocentric capitalist patriarchy which privileges

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<sup>1</sup> James Frideres, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 3-7.

individuals on the basis of race, class and gender.<sup>2</sup> This system and its institutions privilege “rich white men” often at the expense of other groups lower in the hierarchy such as women, the poor and people of colour. White women, wealthy people and Aboriginal men can often access privilege on the basis of race, class or gender since they are privileged in one aspect of the hierarchy. Aboriginal women with low income are not privileged in race, class or gender and sit lowest in the hierarchies of power thereby experiencing the greatest difficulty accessing the Eurocentric capitalist patriarchy. Government institutions serve the needs of those at the top of the hierarchies of power and Aboriginal women experience oppression from these intuitions when their interests conflict with the interests of those in power.

Neocolonial institutions and agencies run by provincial, federal and municipal governments render services to Aboriginal women. In addition to mainstream institutions and agencies, Aboriginal women must often contend with Aboriginal controlled institutions and agencies which are modeled on the neocolonial versions they attempt to replace. Therefore, Aboriginal women continue to face oppression from non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal government institutions in the areas of education, justice, social services, housing and health.

Throughout history and into the present Aboriginal people continue to develop resistance strategies to counter ongoing oppression and assimilation pressures. This resistance has served in many capacities, perhaps most significantly by contributing to Aboriginal cultural and spiritual persistence in the face of continued colonial policies intended to eradicate them. As the primary caregivers of children, women play a central role in the retention and transmission of culture. Therefore, their resistance to colonial oppression significantly affects the well-being and cultural survival of future generations.

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<sup>2</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000)

Aboriginal women have resisted institutional oppression and assimilation in a variety of ways, the most visible forms being political activism and civil disobedience. While these overt forms of resistance are few and far between, women constantly struggle against oppression in their everyday lives with small acts of resistance. The contemporary conceptions and manifestations of resistance in the everyday lives of Aboriginal women have not been seriously considered by scholars in Native Studies.

The goal of my thesis research is to understand everyday forms of contemporary Aboriginal women's resistance to dehumanization from non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal government institutions, and service agencies that provide justice, social services, housing, education and health. The research questions guiding my study include: What are the everyday resistance strategies used by Aboriginal women? What forms do they take? How are they understood by the women engaged in them? And what are the underlying philosophies or beliefs that motivate them?

To accomplish my goal, I conducted qualitative interviews with eleven Aboriginal women living in Saskatoon. The only requirement for participation in this study was a willingness to share stories about government agencies. All of the participants were urban Aboriginal women who were, or had at some time been, dependent on government agencies to meet their basic needs.

The focus of my research is to explore the everyday strategies for resistance to dehumanization. In this paper, dehumanization is defined as conduct contrary to the minimum standards of behaviour established in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Government institutions and agencies are defined as federal, provincial, municipal or

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refers to this as a “white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy”.

Aboriginal government administered bureaucratic organizations which provide justice, health, education, housing and social services to any segment of the Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal women experience social factors which increase their contact with government agencies including relatively poor health and low income as compared to the non-Aboriginal population. Statistics Canada states that self-rated health status, for which people are asked to rate their own health on a scale from excellent to poor, is a reliable indicator of health. In 2003, the gap between the self-rated health status of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women increased between successive age groups.<sup>3</sup> This means that Aboriginal women felt that they become sicker than non-Aboriginal women as they aged.<sup>4</sup> Male and female Aboriginal youth reported the same good health as non-Aboriginal youth. However, by the time Aboriginal women were 65 or older, 45% then reported fair to poor health as compared to 29% of non-Aboriginal women of the same age group. Therefore, Aboriginal women reported that their health declined more significantly over time. Thus, Canadian Aboriginal women had relatively low incomes, were more likely to be single parents and experienced decreased health as they aged. These factors imply increased levels of contact with those government agencies which provide social services, housing and health care as compared to non-Aboriginal women.

In 2006, Aboriginal people made up 10% of Saskatoon's population.<sup>5</sup> There were 19,820 Aboriginal people living in Saskatoon and 51% of them were female. Children and youth comprised a large part of the Aboriginal population. The median age of the Aboriginal population was 22.6 years and almost a third of the population were children 14 and under. The median age of the non-Aboriginal

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<sup>3</sup> Vivian O'Donnell and Heather Tait, *Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 – Initial findings: Well-being of the non-reserve Aboriginal Population* (Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, 2003), 12.

<sup>4</sup> O'Donnell and Tait, *Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 – Initial finding*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa. Released March 13, 2007.

population was a decade older at 35.9 years and only 17.7 % of the population was under 15. Nineteen percent of the Aboriginal women in Saskatoon headed lone parent families <sup>6</sup> while 16 percent of non-Aboriginal women did the same. In 2001, over half of the Aboriginal children in Saskatoon lived in lone parent families as compared to 19% of non-Aboriginal children.<sup>7</sup> This information is not yet available from the 2006 census.

In Saskatoon, the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal women fare worse than for other segments of the population. Income is an important determinant of well-being and Aboriginal women have lower incomes than either non-Aboriginal women or Aboriginal men. The income of a person is the total money received from earnings, support payments, investments and government transfer payments such as welfare and pensions but excluding gifts and winnings. According to the 2006 Canada census data, the median income of Aboriginal men and women in Saskatoon were similar at \$16,965 for men and \$16,201 for women. The main difference was that 11.9% of Aboriginal men's income came from transfer payments while 29.9% of women's income came from this source.<sup>8</sup> Non-Aboriginal women reported a median income of \$5000 more than that of Aboriginal people at \$21,627 and 15.2% of this came from government transfer payments.<sup>9</sup> The labour participation rate of Aboriginal women is 57% compared to the rate of 68% for Aboriginal men<sup>10</sup> and a similar rate 65% for non-Aboriginal women.<sup>11</sup> This disproportion rate for Aboriginal women can be

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<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed September 17, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *Aboriginal Population Profile*. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-594-XWE. Ottawa. Released January 15, 2008. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/aboriginal/Index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed September 17, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Siggner and Costa, *Aboriginal Conditions in Census Metropolitan Areas, 1981-2001*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *Aboriginal Population Profile*. 2006 Census.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *Aboriginal Population Profile*, 2006 Census.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census.

explained by an increase burden of child and family care. Aboriginal men who worked earned approximately \$5000 more per year than Aboriginal women at \$20,082 and \$15,007 respectively.<sup>12</sup> Non-Aboriginal women reported median earnings of \$20,861, similar to that of Aboriginal men.<sup>13</sup>

These figures demonstrate that Aboriginal women are poorer than Aboriginal men and non-Aboriginal women and significantly more dependent on the government for income. This also suggests that Aboriginal women are significantly more in direct contact with government agencies and services than other segments of Canadian society. Low incomes, increased transfer payments, increased single parenthood and declining health indicate that Aboriginal women in Saskatoon would find themselves in the position of having more contact with government services in the areas of health, social services and housing.

### **Relevant Government Agencies**

Within the government, each agency has its own set of responsibilities, mandates and policies and work within those parameters, which are interpreted by the workers who implement them with clients. The government services specifically discussed in this study are social assistance, child protection, policing, housing and health care, with an emphasis on social assistance and child protection. Some of the participants were, at some point, dependent on Aboriginal governments for employment, educational funding or social assistance and talked about the difficulties they encountered with Aboriginal government agencies.

Social assistance, or welfare, is provided by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services through the Saskatchewan Assistance Program (SAP). According to the Government of Saskatchewan website: “The Saskatchewan Assistance Program is a program of last resort for

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<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* (table). *Aboriginal Population Profile*. 2006 Census.

families and individuals who, for various reasons, including disability, illness, low income or unemployment, cannot meet basic living costs.”<sup>14</sup> The program provides funds for shelter and a basic living allowance. This ministry also provides the Transitional Employment Allowance program as an alternative to welfare. According to the Government of Saskatchewan website: “The Transitional Employment Allowance (TEA) is an income support program designed to assist applicants participating in pre-employment programs and services or those who are job ready and seeking employment”.<sup>15</sup> This program provides a single allowance for monthly needs. The TEA program is a labour force attachment program, not a social assistance program, and its primary concern is attaching a client to any job. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives states: “TEA is now the program for which most applicants for welfare qualify. Applicants include those unable to work at the time of application and people with disabilities”.<sup>16</sup>

On August 1, 2008 the programs provided a shelter and living amount which was dependent on family size and location of residence. TEA and SAP provide the same amount of shelter and living allowance for a single employable adult or for a family headed by an employable adult. The TEA program only accepts employable adults, but SAP increases the amounts for single adults who are unemployable. Families receive the same amount whether or not the adults are able to work. The main differences between programs are utility allowance and earnings exemption. SAP pays the full amount of utilities and any earnings are partially exempt up to a maximum amount. The TEA program has maximum utility allowance regardless

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<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (table). 2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Social Assistance Program*. [www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/sap/](http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/sap/) (accessed on Aug 21, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Temporary Employment Allowance*. [www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/tea/](http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/tea/) (accessed on Aug 21, 2008).



of the actual cost and deducts earnings from the benefits dollar for dollar.<sup>17</sup> Since SAP is a program of last resort, all eligible applicants are required to participate in the TEA program, despite the lesser benefits.

A number of reports and studies have concluded that social assistance provides inadequate assistance to meet the basic living needs of recipients. The National Council on Welfare (NCW) concluded that in 2006 the total welfare income was significantly below the after-tax Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). The LICO is a dollar amount calculated by Statistics Canada which represents the least amount of income required to meet the basic needs of a family of a particular size. An amount of income less than the LICO means that a family cannot meet its basic needs on that income. The NCW states that, in Saskatchewan, the total 2006 welfare income including tax credits for a single parent with one child is 87% of the LICO, for a couple with two children it is 77% of the LICO and for a single employable person it is 57% of the LICO.<sup>18</sup> This means that a single parent with one child would have to live with 13% of their family's needs remaining unmet or else they find a way deal with these needs by other means. Similarly, a single employable person would need to deal with a 43% gap in what is required for basic needs and income provided by social assistance. Clearly, people on assistance in Saskatchewan are provided with far less support than is required to meet basic needs.

A previous qualitative study documents how social assistance policy in Saskatchewan impacts women's health. They concluded that: "the low level of benefits prevented them from

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<sup>16</sup> Hunter, Garson and Kathleen Donovan. "Poor need more than T.E.A.: Saskatchewan's Building Independence Program forces people into 'low wage' traps." *Saskatchewan Notes* 4.3. (October 2005), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services, *Social Assistance Rates*. August 1, 2008 and Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services, *Transitional Employment Allowance Rates*. August 1, 2008(pamphlet)

meeting fundamental needs, including food, housing, health care and transportation.”<sup>19</sup> This report was based on seven focus groups with forty-three women living on social assistance in Saskatchewan. It describes the harsh daily reality of these women’s lives and the negative impact policies have on women’s health.

The Ministry of Social Services, through the authority of *The Child and Family Services Act*, deals with the protection of children from neglect by their parent and guardians. The Ministry may apprehend children without the consent of their parents if a child is found in need of protection, or alternately, may take a child into care by agreement between the parent and the Ministry. This Act also deals with foster care and the placement of children in temporary, permanent and therapeutic foster homes. The ministry can provide support services to parents and return children to their families when they feel it is safe to do so. The Act includes a mandate to share and coordinate information with police and other agencies for the purposes of child protection.<sup>20</sup> In 2005, Aboriginal children made up 25% of all children in Saskatchewan between the ages 0-14, and yet, comprised 70% of all the children in foster care.<sup>21</sup>

Saskatchewan Justice is responsible for justice services in Saskatchewan including supervision of police, prosecution services and court services.<sup>22</sup> Police services are provided by the City of Saskatoon. They have the authority to uphold municipal, provincial and federal laws through a number of jurisdictional and funding agreements with federal and provincial

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<sup>18</sup> National Council of Welfare, *Welfare Incomes 2006*, (The council).

[www.ncwcnes.net/en/research/welfare-bienetre.html](http://www.ncwcnes.net/en/research/welfare-bienetre.html) (accessed on Aug 22, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Mildred Kerr, Debbie Frost and Diane Bignell, *Don’t We Count as People?: Saskatchewan Social Welfare Policy And Women’s Health* (Regina: The Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence, 2004), ii.

<sup>20</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Provincial Child Abuse Protocol 2006* (Regina: The Interdepartmental Child Abuse Committee, 2006), 18.

<sup>21</sup> National Council on Welfare, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children and Youth: A Time to Act* (Ottawa: The Council, 2007), 86.

authorities. The police have the primary responsibility for public safety and may investigate alleged criminal acts, lay criminal charges and provide victim services. Corrections and Public Safety is responsible for providing custody (prison) service including operating Pine Grove Correctional Centre which is the provincial women's jail in Saskatchewan. Aboriginal women are over represented in the criminal justice system both as offenders and as victims of crimes. One report states that Aboriginal women represent 29% of women in federal correction facilities yet make up only 3% of the general Canadian population.<sup>23</sup>

The troika of child protection, social assistance and the police force is particularly difficult for participants to deal with. Social assistance requires clients to sign consent forms allowing the collection and sharing of any information with any agency in order to access benefits. Child protection workers are also able to share information with other agencies and workers when it can be justified under child protection. According to participants, the child protection office routinely shares information with the social assistance office, which is part of the same ministry. Additionally, police officers often accompany child protection workers on cases and have far greater latitude to enter homes, conduct searches and confine individuals than in a criminal or civil matter.

Social housing is provided by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. They presently have 31,000 units across Saskatchewan administered directly through the Social Housing Rental Program or through non-profit housing organizations.<sup>24</sup> The Task Force on Housing

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<sup>22</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Provincial Child Abuse Protocol 2006*, 17

<sup>23</sup> National Women's Association of Canada, *Aboriginal Women and the Legal Justice System in Canada: An Issue Paper*. Prepared for the National Aboriginal Women's Summit June 20-22, 2007 in Corner Brook, NL. <http://www.laa.gov.nl.ca/laa/naws/pdf/nwac-legal.pdf> (accessed on Aug 29, 2008)

<sup>24</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Social Housing Rental Program*. [www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/shrp/](http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/shrp/) (accessed Aug 21, 2008)

Affordability has concluded that the economic boom in Saskatchewan has created higher wages and population growth which in turn has created a surge in housing prices across the province. From September 2006 to September 2007 housing prices in Saskatoon rose by 50% and the vacancy rate dropped to 0.6 per cent. This has had devastating affects on families with low incomes. However this is not a new problem. According to the task force, as far back as six years ago there were 37,170 people living in unacceptable housing circumstances.<sup>25</sup> Aboriginal people are disproportionately affected by the housing crunch. According to the task force: “First Nations and Métis make up just under 15 per cent of Saskatchewan’s population, yet represent 23 per cent of people living with a core housing need”.<sup>26</sup>

Health services are provided by a number of agencies. Under the *Canada Health Act*, provinces and territories are responsible for delivering universal health care services such as doctors and hospitals. This does not include drugs, dental care, vision care, counseling or ambulance services. Non-insured health benefits are available to First Nations and Inuit people through the federal Non-insured Health Benefit program, which provides a range of services not available through other private or provincial plans. These services include limited coverage for drugs, dental care, vision care, counseling and medical transportation. An eligible person in this program is a registered Indian, an Inuk or an infant of an eligible parent.<sup>27</sup> The province provides comparable programs to low income people through Saskatchewan Health. Children from low income families who are not receiving social assistance receive a full range of non-insured health services through the Family Health Benefits program. Their parents receive limited assistance for

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<sup>25</sup> The Task Force on Housing Affordability, *Affordable Housing: An Investment* (Regina, Ministry of Social Services, 2007),7.

<sup>26</sup> The Task Force on Housing Affordability, *Affordable Housing*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Health Canada, *Non-insured Health Benefits for First Nations and Inuit*. [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nhib-ssna/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nhib-ssna/index-eng.php) (accessed on Aug 21, 2008)

prescription drugs, chiropractic visits, x-rays and eye examinations.<sup>28</sup> The Supplementary Health Program provides non-insured services to people on social assistance. The coverage that a person is eligible for under this program depends upon a number of complex factors such as age, employability, and time on assistance. Employable adults receive the lowest levels of coverage.<sup>29</sup>

### **Positioning the Researcher**

It is difficult to distinguish the researcher from the research. Each woman I interviewed told a piece of my story and I had lived a piece of hers. I am a member of Batchewana First Nation in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. As an infant, I was adopted to a non-Aboriginal home in what came to be called the Sixties Scoop. When I was twelve, my adoption broke down and I went through a series of foster homes. The foster homes were not any better than the home from which I had been removed, some were far worse. I escaped foster care by a teen pregnancy and a short marriage to an abusive alcoholic. I had two children with my husband and went on to live on welfare for fifteen years while I struggled to get a high school education and finally an Associate of Science Degree in Computer Science. I continued on to complete a Bachelor of Arts Degree, living on band funding during the regular academic session and on welfare during the intersession, except one year when I found summer employment.

I had no involvement with child protection for my own children until the summer of 1999. At the time I had five children and was pregnant with the sixth. A little boy that I ended up adopting was in a situation where his biological family was clearly unable to care for him. When social services planned to adopt him to his non-Aboriginal foster parents I stepped in, and asked that he be placed with me as an Aboriginal adoptive home. I suddenly became a child

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<sup>28</sup> Saskatchewan Health, *Family Health Benefits* (pamphlet)

protection concern, although this had not been the case before my application. I went through over a year of aggressive investigations and interventions in an effort to exclude me as a potential home for the child until, not being able to justify further involvement, they withdrew. After almost three years in foster care, this young boy became my son through custom adoption in the summer of 2001. He is my seventh child.

Through these processes, I found myself spending much of my life at the whim of the latest policy change and the subjective opinion of a social worker or financial support worker. Some workers were helpful, others simply doing a job, and others seemed out to sabotage me. It is not simply a racial problem. In my initial naivety, I had expected the Aboriginal women they sent to help me would be supportive. It was with great sadness that I found that many Aboriginal workers were far worse to deal with than non-Aboriginal workers. Many workers perceived me as difficult to deal with when I would not consent so they became coercive, threatening to withhold cheques or apprehend children if I did not comply. For example, as part of a risk reduction plan I was assigned a female Aboriginal family support worker who was tasked primarily with helping me break through my ‘denial’ and admit the ways in which my home was alleged to be unsafe for children. This admission, if given, would be the sole piece of evidence that my home was indeed unsafe for children. I refused her services until I was informed that my children would be apprehended if I did not comply with my risk reduction plan. She enthusiastically counselled me until, to her amazement, the ministry withdrew without any progress being made on this front.

My own experiences have proven to be both beneficial and potentially problematic in this current study. Without my experience, this research may not have been done. Without having

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<sup>29</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, *Supplementary Health Program*.

experience in “the system” I might not have believed some of the stories these women shared had I not lived them myself. I may not have believed that a worker would say such things, or behave in such a high handed manner. It may have been easier to believe that these women had done something that they were hiding from me to deserve the treatment they received from workers or that prompted the workers to act in negative ways. This inside perspective could be construed as an inherent bias. Throughout this study and the writing of this thesis, I find myself retelling and analysing my own experiences through the stories the women shared with me.

### **Positioning this Thesis**

By way of a series of narrative oral histories, focus group and interviews with two Aboriginal Elders, this thesis examines contemporary experiences of Aboriginal women who find or found themselves dependent on government agencies and who address their dehumanization through a variety of resistance strategies. To the best of my ability I strove to respectfully represent their experiences and their own analyses of these experiences.

In order to be useful to Aboriginal women, this project has been based on and strives to be consistent with the participants’ own philosophies, teachings and experiences. Methodological frameworks include grounded theory and oral history. Theoretical frameworks which proved useful include James C. Scott’s work on peasant resistance, (post/neo) colonial theory and Aboriginal feminism. My analyses examine how Aboriginal women experience and understand the realities of dehumanization and resistance from their perspectives.

Chapter Two consists of a review of the literature and the approach used to review the literature that comes from James C. Scott’s model of resistance which emphasises everyday acts of resistance. The literature is reviewed for the purpose of determining how scholars have

approached and treated resistance among Aboriginal people in general and Aboriginal women specifically. In the absence of strong literature on Aboriginal women's everyday resistance, other theoretical frameworks are examined including colonialism, neo-colonialism, feminism and Aboriginal feminism.

Chapter Three provides a discussion of Grounded Theory and oral history as these are the two primary research methods used in this study. It also provides an overview of the project and discussions of the interview methods, ethical concerns, recruitment, community feedback, transcription methods and analysis applied in this study.

Chapter Four focuses on what the women participants say about dehumanization. Based on the United Nation *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* this chapter establishes the dehumanization of the women in this study such that 1) Aboriginal women experience denial of basic human rights such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care, 2) Aboriginal women experience harassment, abuse and racial prejudice from persons within the system and 3) Aboriginal women experience interference with autonomy and self-determination.

Chapter Five focuses on what the women say about resistance. First, it examines Aboriginal women's responses to their dehumanization experiences with government agencies and identifies three strategies that Aboriginal women participants use to counter dehumanization attempts: direct resistance, indirect resistance and hidden resistance. These three resistance strategies are further broken down into short and long-term goals. Second, it relates the interrelationship of resistance, personal growth and community empowerment described by the women in this study. Third, it contains the women's own opinions on their resistance to government agencies.



Chapter Six is the result of two focus group sessions with the women participants in this study and additional interviews with two urban Aboriginal women Elders. The women agreed with the results of the study and emphasized the right to information about services, and the significance of community empowerment. The Elders spoke about their own experiences, their concern for the women in the study and the need for advocacy and support. These results suggest that resistance strategies are not static but appear to evolve over time from short-term emotion based reactions to more thought-out long term and goal based strategies.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to comprehend the strategies of resistance used by Aboriginal women in their everyday contact with government agencies, it is necessary to define the meaning and scope of everyday resistance, particularly as it is manifest by Aboriginal women. Resistance is generally defined as the opposition to a force. In colonial/post-colonial studies, it is considered the struggle of the colonized Indigenous people against the colonizing group through active or passive means.<sup>1</sup> Within Native Studies, resistance is often theorized as resistance of First Nations and Metis people against municipal, provincial and federal government action and/or social forces from the dominant culture. Resistance includes active and militant forms such as blockades, demonstration and other forms of civil disobedience. Resistance is also theorized as legal resistance in courts regarding Aboriginal and human rights, often taking the form of legal disputes with the Crown over hunting and fishing rights and Aboriginal title. First Nations women, in particular, have a history of court cases regarding opposition to gender discrimination in the *Indian Act* or at band level. When resistance is theorized as political resistance, it is discussed as the struggle for sovereignty, self-determination and self-government at the level of band or First Nation.

With some exceptions, most literature on Aboriginal people's resistance implicitly theorizes resistance in one or more of the above capacities. However, relatively few people take part in these forms of resistance. The task, then, is to discover other forms of resistance strategies which are not openly or overtly militaristic, legal or political. James C. Scott's definition of resistance, his examination of everyday resistance and his assertion that private transcripts (or

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 3.

hidden discourses) provide the ideological basis for resistance prove useful in providing an alternate conception of resistance. Scott's work provides the ideological bases for resistance in this study.

Using Scott's model of resistance, this chapter examines the literature for examples of everyday resistance of Aboriginal people in general and Aboriginal women specifically. Although literature on Aboriginal resistance is plentiful, it focused on legal and political resistance, or collective acts of defiance. With the exception of a single work, these sources yielded few additional insights into alternative forms of Aboriginal women's everyday resistance.

In the absence of strong literature on Aboriginal women's everyday resistance, other theoretical frameworks are examined including colonialism and the results of colonialism. This study establishes that neo-colonialism is the framework in which the resistance is situated. The literature review then examines at length feminism and the advent of Aboriginal feminism and dwells on the suitability of feminism as a framework for Aboriginal women's studies. This literature review will demonstrate that there is a gap in the existing literature on Aboriginal women's everyday resistance to government colonialism and that existing analytical/theoretical frameworks for understanding Indigenous women's everyday forms of resistance are weak.

## **Resistance**

### **Scott's Resistance**

There are very few studies of everyday forms of resistance and the seminal work in this field has been done by James C. Scott. His research with peasants in Malaysia has produced a detailed definition of resistance as:

...any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes.<sup>2</sup>

In this definition, it is the act itself rather than the scope of the act or the outcome which represents the resistance, and the fact that it is anonymous or hidden does not negate it. Scott argues that resistance is part of basic human nature. Drawing upon a theory out of social psychology called reactance, Scott explains that it is based on the premise that there is a human desire for freedom and autonomy which, when threatened by use of force, leads to a reaction of opposition.<sup>3</sup> The greater the threat to freedom and autonomy, the greater the resistance. When described as a psychological need, it follows that resistance can be personally fulfilling, especially when it is first undertaken. According to Scott: “The sense of personal release, satisfaction, pride, and elation – despite the actual risks – is an unmistakable part of how this first open declaration is experienced.”<sup>4</sup> Resistance then can be considered a human trait which opposes oppression.

### **Everyday Forms of Resistance**

In *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), Scott describes the everyday peasant resistance in a Malaysian village.<sup>5</sup> He argues that peasants often take part in small acts of unorganized and hidden resistance, and claims that organized, overt resistance is usually restricted to academics or middle classes. Resistance of the weak is frequently well hidden from the powerful, taking the

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<sup>2</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak, Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale, 1985), 290.

<sup>3</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden transcripts* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), 109.

<sup>4</sup> Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance*, 208.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

form of small but meaningful acts of resistance that are not readily visible to the casual observer. Scott explains: “Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on.”<sup>6</sup> Since many existing concepts of resistance do not delve beneath superficial appearances of acquiescence, these forms of resistance are often not recognized as such. According to Scott the tendency to dismiss individual acts as insignificant and apply the term ‘resistance’ only to collective or organized action is problematic.<sup>7</sup> Scott states:

...the problem lies in what is a misleading, sterile, and sociologically naïve insistence on distinguishing ‘self-indulgent,’ individual acts, on the one hand, from presumably ‘principled,’ selfless, collective actions, on the other, and excluding the former from the category of *real* resistance.<sup>8</sup>

Individual acts of resistance are effective and safe for peasants because they are near anonymous, easily initiated and difficult to identify or deter. Scott claims that peasant forms of resistance have certain features in common: “They require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understanding and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any form of direct, symbolic confrontation with authority.”<sup>9</sup> Everyday forms may be overlooked by researchers interested in larger, organized acts of resistance either because they are not considered important or they are not considered real resistance because they are individual acts which avoid direct confrontation. Scott maintains that everyday forms of resistance are both real and significant.

Isolated individual acts may initially appear irrelevant, especially when seemingly sporadic and self-seeking, but when such acts occur frequently enough they indicate patterns of

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<sup>6</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 297.

<sup>8</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 295.

<sup>9</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi.

dissent. The cumulative affect of a countless number of such acts is undeniable. Scott gives the example of military campaigns that fail because of random and selfish acts of desertion by the peasants who were conscripted to an army. Yet many scholars ignore these small acts as resistance and look for overt defiance and collective movements. A myopic definition of resistance is not beneficial to the current analysis because manifestations of resistance are varied and may move from one type to another depending on circumstances. Any useful definition and analysis of resistance must allow for diverse forms. According to Scott, by looking for only collective or overt resistance: "...we simply allow the structure of domination to define for us what is resistance and what is not resistance."<sup>10</sup> Scott argues that small forms of resistance have definite advantages and are better suited for some situations of oppression than organizing as a visible and definable group. The dominant culture has processes designed to quash large, collective resistance movements, but the random acts of individuals cannot be as easily contained. According to Scott:

Unlike hierarchical formal organizations, there is no center, no leadership, no identifiable structure that can be co-opted or neutralized. What is lacking in terms of central coordination may be compensated for by flexibility and persistence. These forms of resistance will win no set-piece battles, but they are admirably adapted to long-run campaigns of attrition.<sup>11</sup>

According to Scott, the narrow definition of resistance, that of a coordinated and formal organization, is of little assistance in understanding actions in small communities with dense informal networks and established subcultures of resistance.<sup>12</sup>

Aboriginal scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson states that Aboriginal women resist power relations in ways which were usually discreet but not necessarily passive.<sup>13</sup> Resistance manifests

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<sup>10</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 299.

<sup>11</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 298.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 300.

itself in many forms and, according to Moreton-Robinson: “Our resistances can be visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, explicit and covert, partial and incomplete, and intentional and unintentional.”<sup>14</sup> Any definitions of resistance useful to the study of Aboriginal women must be broad enough give consideration to any and all acts, excluding complete acquiescence, as possible resistance. Otherwise, many forms of resistance will continue to go unnoticed.

### **Public and Private Transcripts of Resistance**

In a later work, Scott (1990) examines the relationship between the dominators and dominated in Europe, Asia and American slavery to test his theories because these situations exemplify the most extreme oppression. He asserts that the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed has both public and private transcripts.<sup>15</sup> Transcripts are the patterns of spoken and unspoken interactions between and within groups of people. The public transcript is the official discourse consisting of those interactions that are openly shared between the oppressor and the oppressed. These are constructed by the dominant class to support the legitimacy of the social order they have established for their own benefit. The public transcript for the most part acknowledges the relationship of the oppressor as powerful and the oppressed as powerless. Both the oppressor and the oppressed maintain the public appearance, the oppressor to retain power and the oppressed to escape punishment.

Conversely, Scott claims the private transcripts are those discourses that are apparent only within each group. According to Scott, the private transcript is unrevealed, and remains hidden within groups:

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<sup>13</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism* (Queensland: University of Queensland, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, xxiii.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

The fact is that power-laden situations are nearly always inauthentic; the exercise of power nearly always drives a portion of the full transcript underground. Allowing always for the exceptional moments of uncontrolled anger and desperation, the normal tendency will be for the dependent individual to reveal only that part in his or her full transcript in encounters with the powerful that is both safe and appropriate to reveal.<sup>16</sup>

It is only in the private transcripts that the oppressor may admit weakness or the oppressed may express disdain for the powerful. The private transcripts of the oppressed include narratives which deny the legitimacy of the oppressor often in the form of gossip, revenge fantasies in the form of religious prophecies and trickster narratives. For example, the oppressed may use a trickster narrative which features the triumph of the weaker trickster character over a larger and more powerful foe, for example, Brer Rabbit.<sup>17</sup> The private transcripts of the oppressed are well-known and circulated among the oppressed but are not articulated to the oppressor because of the potential consequences. While the private transcripts are always present, they appear in public as recognizable defiance only occasionally and only under extreme circumstances.

Scott further explains that resistance consists of the maintenance of a sophisticated counter-hegemonic ideology that competes with the dominant class ideology. The competing ideology, reflected in the private transcripts, provides the normative basis for actions of resistance. According to Scott: "Better put, perhaps, resistance to ideological domination requires a counterideology – a negation – that will effectively provide a general normative form to the host of resistant practices invented in self-defence by any subordinate group."<sup>18</sup> Any acts of resistance require a basis in ideas of resistance, and this resistance ideology is far more significant than any particular act.

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<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 286.

<sup>17</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 162. Brer Rabbit was a trickster figure who represented black slaves. Brer Rabbit defeated more powerful foes such as Brer Wolf through wit and guile.



The rupture where the private transcripts become public represents a critical juncture in quality of resistance. Scott explains: “Here the crucial distinction is between a *practical failure* to comply and a *declared refusal* to comply. The former does not necessarily breach the normative order of domination the latter almost always does.”<sup>19</sup> An ideological statement of resistance threatens the fundamental legitimacy of the society and as such represents a far greater threat than acts which break rules and norms but do not threaten question the legitimacy of them. According to Scott an open refusal to comply with a hegemonic performance is particularly dangerous because it calls into question all the other acts that this form of subordination entails.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, even without a clear statement of ideological resistance, a single effective act of resistance has an effect. According to Scott:

A single act of successful public insubordination, however, pierces the smooth surface of apparent consent, which itself is a visible reminder of underlying power relations.<sup>21</sup>

A number of public acts of resistance represent a significant social statement by the oppressed.

Scott’s insights and definition of resistance provides an ideal approach for studying everyday forms of resistance engaged in by Aboriginal women in this study because most of them did not engage in collective acts of resistance. Only two of the eleven participants mentioned organized resistance movements and only one of these was claimed to be active in a political organization at the time of the interview. Scott’s work provides the basis for framing resistance outside the collective, legal or political actions and helps us see what else the women were doing. His work informed the search for resistance as random isolated acts while constructing these acts as meaningful and potentially powerful. It informs us about the presence

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 203.

<sup>20</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 205.

of public and private transcripts which are played out in interactions with government agency workers. It informs the search for private transcripts as the basis of an underlying ideology of resistance. Overall, Scott's work provides the basis for the way resistance was defined and treated in this study.

## Resistance in the Literature

### General Resistance of Aboriginal People

Studies which examine Aboriginal resistance generally, focus on public resistance arising from various legal and political issues faced by Aboriginal people, especially those concerning land rights and dispossession from the land. Resistance in this context consists of overt acts of protest such as blockades or stand-offs, and other acts of open defiance. Miles Goldstick (1987) writes on resistance to uranium mining in Saskatchewan.<sup>22</sup> Hugh Brody (1988) examined the Beaver peoples' resistance against the Alaska Highway pipeline.<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey York (1989) examines resistance across Canadian in his ground-breaking work *The Dispossessed: Life and death in native Canada*.<sup>24</sup> Boyce Richardson (1989, 1991, 1993) edited an important anthology and wrote books about injustices, land dispossession and resistance throughout Canada.<sup>25</sup> John

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<sup>21</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 205.

<sup>22</sup> Miles Goldstick, *Wallaston: People Resisting Genocide* (Montréal: Black Rose, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey York, *The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Boyce Richardson, ed., *Drumbeat: Anger and renewal in Indian country* (Toronto: Summerhill, 1989), Boyce Richardson, *Strangers devour the land: A chronicle of the assault upon the last coherent hunting culture in North America, the Cree Indians of northern Quebec, and their vast primeval homelands* (Post Mills, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 1991) and Boyce Richardson, *People of Terra Nullius: Betrayal and rebirth in Aboriginal Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1994).

Goddard (1991) examines the Lubicon Cree displacement and their resistance.<sup>26</sup> These early works were written by non-Aboriginal scholars, often anthropologists, and were meant to publicize the plight of a particular group of Aboriginal people.

Publications surged in the 1990s as a number of public resistance activities increased across Canada. The Temagami Blockade of 1989, Ipperwash in 1990 and the Gustafson Lake stand-off of 1995 spurred a number of publications. Hodgins and Benediction (1989) wrote on the Temagami Ojibway in northern Ontario.<sup>27</sup> Bruce W. Hodgins, Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (2003) edited a collection of resistance literature based on the Temagami blockade and Aboriginal resistance in general.<sup>28</sup> This book has a chapter written by a woman protester at the Temagami blockade which will be considered further on. Peter Edwards (2001) examines the killing of Dudley George an unarmed protester at Ipperwash.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Janice G.A.E. Switlo (1997) wrote a legal analysis of the Gustafsen Lake Stand-off<sup>30</sup> and Sandra Lambertus (1994) examined media images and the government's use of media.<sup>31</sup> These publications, written by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors, showed that Aboriginal resistance was recognized as opposition government actions in highly publicized, militaristic events. These books are

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<sup>26</sup> John Goddard, *Last Stand of the Lubicon Cree* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Bruce W. Hodgins and Jamie Benidickson, *The Temagami Experience: Recreation, Resources, and Aboriginal Rights in the Northern Ontario Wilderness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Hodgins, W. Lischke, Ute and David T. McNab, eds., *Blockades and Resistance: Studies in Action and Peace and the Temagami Blockades of 1988-90* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Peter Edwards, *One Dead Indian: The Premier, the Police, and the Ipperwash Crisis* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Janice G.A.E Switlo, *Gustafsen Lake under Siege: Exposing the Truth about the Gustafsen Lake Stand-off* (Peachland, B.C.: TIAC, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Sandra Lambertus, *Wartime Images, Peacetime Wounds: The Media and the Gustafsen Lake Standoff* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004).

intended to analyze the conflict from an Aboriginal viewpoint or tell the stories of the activists involved.

The Oka Crisis of 1990 spurred over a decade of studies on Indigenous resistance. Among these are the works of Craig MacLaine and Michael S. Baxendale (1990) which is a collection of pictures and a day-by-day record of events from March 11 to September 26, 1990 from Mohawk perspectives.<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey York and Loreen Pinder (1991), and Rick Hornung (1991) examine colonization and the use of overwhelming military force by the Canadian government.<sup>33</sup> Ronald Cross, one of the main figures in the stand-off, with the help of H  l  ne S  vigny, (1994) wrote a political autobiography of his experiences<sup>34</sup> and Peter Williamson (1997) wrote his master's thesis on media representations of the crisis.<sup>35</sup> These works analyze the Oka Stand-Off from a variety of perspectives and tell the stories of many participants usually from an Aboriginal viewpoint. The works are often employ sovereigntist rhetoric and/or a rights-based analysis, citing Aboriginal Rights and Title.

For the most part, this body of literature focuses on the short-term goals of a particular group in a particular geographic area which acted as a catalyst for protest action. These acts of resistance generally feature male actors on the front lines and conflicts which were met with overwhelming violence from the police and army. Women are peripheral to the resistance with the exception of the literature on the Oka Resistance which examines the leadership role of the Clan Mothers and the roles of various Mohawk women. For example, Donna Goodleaf (1995),

<sup>32</sup> Craig MacLaine and Michael S. Baxendale, *This Land is Our Land: The Mohawk Revolt at Oka* (Montréal: Optimum, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey York and Loreen Pinder, *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* (Toronto: Little, 1991) and Rick Hornung, *One Nation Under the Gun* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Ronald Cross and Hélène Sévigny, *Lasagna: The Man behind the Mask* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1994).

also known as Donna Kahenrakwas, addressed the Oka Crisis from a Mohawk woman's point of view and provided analysis of the experiences of herself and the other women involved.<sup>36</sup>

Although the attention given to overt acts of resistance is significant, the study focused on the exceptional and ignore the everyday resistance activities of most Aboriginal women.

Some studies address Aboriginal resistance in the context of collective long-term action without a specific catalyst. Political theorist, Deborah Lee Simmons (1995) writes about Aboriginal agency in the shaping of history using a Marxist theoretical framework.<sup>37</sup> She states:

the resistance of the aboriginal, métis and white Northwesterners, however uneven and disarticulated it may have been, prevented the state from establishing control entirely on its own terms. Despite growing repression, métis and especially aboriginal land remained a major obstacle to the expansion of capitalist agriculture.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Métis engaged in military resistance, they also engaged in other, more mundane forms of economic resistance using their positions in the fur trade and connections to the land. Geographer Michael Ripmeester (1997, 2003) has written articles about the resistance of the Mississauga to Methodist missionaries during the early reserve period.<sup>39</sup> He claims that the Mississauga had three choices: to assimilate church values, return to a traditional lifestyle or to reject both and live in the margins of both societies. In the course of his research he identified

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Williamson, "So I Can Hold my Head High: History and Representations of the Oka Crisis" (Master's thesis, Carleton University, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Donna Goodleaf, *Entering the War Zone: A Mohawk Perspective on Resisting Invasions* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Deborah Lee Simmons, "Against Capitalism: The Political Economy of Aboriginal Resistance in Canada" (Ph. D. diss., York University, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Simmons, "Against Capitalism," 324.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Ripmeester, "It is scarcely to be believed...': The Mississauga Indians and the Grepe Island Mission, 1826-183," *Canadian Geographer* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 157- 169 and Michael Ripmeester, "Intentional Resistance or Just 'Bad Behaviour': Reading for Everyday Resistance at the Alderville First Nation, 1837-76," in *Blockades and Resistance: Studies in Action and Peace and the Temagami Blockades of 1988-89*, ed. Bruce Hodgins, Ute W. Lischke and David T. McNab, 105-126 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University).

seemingly ‘bad’ behaviour as a form of resistance to the social norms of the settler culture. The works of both these authors are significant in identifying everyday collective forms of resistance operating in a particular historical context. Simmons provides a general overview from an economic history perspective, while Ripmeester focused on a particular historic period, a specific geographic area, and a specific set of people in interaction with each other. Although neither author focused on women specifically or did a gender analysis of resistance strategies, these works do show how some Aboriginal people historically engaged in forms of resistance that were not militant or openly defiant.

### **Women’s Everyday Resistance**

Feminist scholars have addressed everyday forms of woman’s resistance. A number of feminist scholars have studied the role of oppression and resistance in everyday life and demonstrate that forms of everyday resistance, or women’s agency, exist where male dominance seems especially oppressive. Anthropologist Susan Carol Rogers (1975) examines the hidden power of women in the French peasant community.<sup>40</sup> She states that although men seemed to be in control, women had a great deal of power from within their own realm. Women demonstrated power covertly by manipulation of knowledge. Women stayed in the village and were socially active during the day while the men worked in the fields and had limited contact with other men. The women used their social network, selective information and gossip to gain power. Theologian Linda Boynon Arthur (1993) studies Mennonite women’s use of clothing as a form

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<sup>40</sup> Susan Carol Rogers, “Sex Roles in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *American Ethnologist* 2, no. 4 (1975):727-756.

of resistance against the male domination of the Mennonite church.<sup>41</sup> Women viewed the church control over their clothing as an assertion of male power over them, since women's clothing was more strictly controlled than men's clothing. Women made minor changes to clothing that were not readily apparent and, therefore, were not noticed by the male ministers. For example, the pattern on the cloth may be similar while the actual material of cloth may change, or hidden zippers may be added in addition to the required buttons. Historian Linda Gordon (1993) discussed how women in abusive situations do not always fit the victim label and show strength and agency when dealing with their oppression.<sup>42</sup> She explained that women not only resisted their abusive partners but also negotiated rights through the social service agencies who attempt to help them. Women were not passive. Rather, they showed an awareness of their situation that was often different from those of the service provider. These studies shed more light on gendered everyday resistance that occurs in non-Third World conditions, situations which differ from those in Scott's studies.

### **Aboriginal Woman's Resistance**

Very few studies focus specifically on the contexts, nature and strategies of Aboriginal women's resistance. The literature on Aboriginal women often deals with the legal status of women as registered Indians under the Indian Act and/or their legal rights to access to band membership and matrimonial homes on the reserve, especially when these are denied on the basis of gender. These studies explore and analyze colonial influence on gender relations

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<sup>41</sup> Linda Boynon Arthur, "Clothing, Control, and Women's Agency: The Mitigation of Patriarchal Power," in *Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourse of Power and Resistance*, eds. Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Linda Gordon, "Women's Agency, Social Control, and the Construction of 'Rights' by Battered Women," in *Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourse of Power and Resistance*, eds. Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1993).

including the activities of various churches, and particularly emphasize gender discrimination in the Indian Act and the subsequent legislative enactment of Bill C-31. However, the emphasis of these studies is on overt resistance through political activism or the court system. Kathleen Jamieson (1978) wrote her powerful *Indian women and the law in Canada: Citizens minus* which examined gender discrimination in the Indian Act.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Janet Silman (1987) documents gender discrimination in her Tobique Aboriginal community and a subsequent march to Ottawa.<sup>44</sup> Recent dissertations address continuing gender discrimination which occurs despite changes in the Indian Act including Linda Sutherland (1995) and Joyce Audry Green (1997).<sup>45</sup> In addition to studying discrimination, these studies examine how Aboriginal women have resisted oppression in overt ways while simultaneously demonstrating how oppression continues. They make clear that Aboriginal women have their own gender specific legal and political issues which they must negotiate separately and which may conflict with the interests of Aboriginal men. While these studies are important, they do not reflect the everyday lives of Aboriginal women. Rather, they exemplify collective and organized acts of resistance which are departures from the norm and departures from the patterns of everyday life. Women have resisted colonial institutions in more mundane ways which must also be recognized.

One of the most significant works on Aboriginal women's overt resistance is the 2005 report by researchers Constance Deiter and Darlene Rude titled *Human Security and Aboriginal*

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<sup>43</sup> Kathleen Jamieson, *Indian Women and the Law in Canada: Citizens Minus* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1978).

<sup>44</sup> Janet Silman, *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Linda Sutherland, "Citizen minus: Aboriginal Women and Indian Self-government: Race, Nation, Class and Gender" (Master's thesis, University of Regina, 1995) and Joyce Green, "Exploring identity and citizenship: Aboriginal women, Bill C-31 and the Sawridge Case" (Ph.D diss., University of Alberta, 1997).



*Women in Canada*.<sup>46</sup> This report studies the connections between Aboriginal women, protest and human security. Although it is focused on the overt or public political resistance, it offers a significant step towards theorizing their resistance activities in a dedicated study. The authors argue that Aboriginal women are key players in efforts to preserve their cultures, uphold their constitutional rights and defend themselves from encroachment to their land and culture. Women are in the forefront of protest activities regarding fishing rights, clear cut logging, and proposed ski resort development. Frequently, they are the first to initiate resistance and protests, acting as strategists, spokespersons, mediators and front-line activists. This research consists of interviews and focus groups conducted with 20 women in three First Nations communities: Burnt Church, NB, Grassy Narrows, Ont. and Mount Currie, BC. The authors argue that Aboriginal “women’s roles in protests are derived, in part, from the more powerful and elevated positions they once held within their societies.”<sup>47</sup>

This report considers Aboriginal women’s protests in the context of human security. The authors conclude that Canada’s federal government human security approach, enshrined in Bill C-36, is based on the ability or obligation of the state to intervene in the event of conflict situations to provide assistance, prevention or military force and is designed to defend Canadian people from threats due to terrorism, drug trafficking and small arms trade.<sup>48</sup> Against this backdrop of resistance, Canada’s anti-terrorism law opens the door for the continued denial of Aboriginal rights and title, and excessive use of force by law enforcement officials. According to the authors, Bill C-36 has raised the concern of Aboriginal leaders who fear that the anti-terrorist

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<sup>46</sup> Constance Deiter and Darlene Rude, *Human Security and Aboriginal Women in Canada* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Deiter and Rude, *Human Security and Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Deiter and Rude, *Human Security and Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 3.

legislation will be used against Aboriginal people who protest.<sup>49</sup> The report examines the experiences Aboriginal women who openly protest militantly and politically.

### **Aboriginal Woman's Everyday Resistance**

Only a handful of studies directly address women's resistance strategies outside the legal or political realm. Paula Gunn Allen (1986), an Aboriginal feminist, examines the status of women during the early contact period and urges women to resist subjugation and recover the feminine power in traditions that were present in pre-contact societies.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Karen Anderson (1991) examines the subjugation and resistance of Native women by the Jesuit missionaries in New France.<sup>51</sup> Carol Devens (1992) examines the resistance of women in the great Lakes area.<sup>52</sup> Diane P. Payment (1996) focuses on the contributions of Métis women at the Battle of Batoche arguing that Métis women took part in the Riel Resistance in ways that were not readily apparent to the casual observer.<sup>53</sup> These studies show that women have faced oppression in different forms than men and have had to devise different resistance strategies. Although they examine women's resistance they do not examine everyday forms of resistance since the Battle of Batoche was an aberration rather than a part of everyday life. Nonetheless, these studies are significant, and provide historical background information for my study of contemporary

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<sup>49</sup> Deiter and Rude, *Human Security and Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Tradition* (Boston: Beacon, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> Karen Anderson, *Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (New York : Routledge, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Diane P. Payment, "'La vie en rose'? Métis women at Batoche, 1870-1920," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength*, ed. Christine Miller and Patricia Maria Chuchryk, 19-38 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1996).

Aboriginal women since they highlight that historically Aboriginal women engaged significant and varied forms of resistance.

Aboriginal women's resistance is also evident in their life histories where many demonstrated that they resisted injustice despite consequences using a variety of strategies.

Moreton-Robinson states:

In the life writings of Indigenous women there are numerous examples of overt acts of resistance occurring on a daily basis....Stealing, lying, making use of white property, mimicking and outright willfulness, escape and sometimes violence find expression in white cultural domains outside the mission or reserve, in public spaces and households where these Indigenous women are enmeshed in relations of dominance and oppression.<sup>54</sup>

Not only did the women resist, but their life histories described their resistance strategies to a larger audience, making writing about resistance itself an act of resistance.

Cree/Métis writer and educator Kim Anderson (2000) comes closest to studying contemporary Aboriginal women's everyday resistance in her work which focuses on examining and challenging the negative images of Aboriginal women.<sup>55</sup> Anderson goes beyond large scale organized movement, political and legal resistance and strongly focuses on individual resistance to a negative definition of Aboriginal womanhood. She states "On a personal level, Native women have had to defend their identities. This meant learning to resist stereotypes, imposed roles and negative definitions of their being, as well as learning to cope with the poor treatment from others that results from all of this."<sup>56</sup> Most of her examples of resistance are individual acts.

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<sup>54</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Sumach, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 115

Anderson asserts that negative images of Aboriginal women are part and parcel of colonization, and therefore, resisting negative images is resistance to colonization itself. She examines how women keep their power despite oppression and what they construct to replace negative stereotypes. She argues that Aboriginal women resist negative definitions by reclaiming Aboriginal traditions, translating them into a contemporary context and acting on them in their communities. Aboriginal women engage in acts of resistance that include openly rejecting stereotypes, writing, creativity, resisting assimilation and rebelling against the church. She claims that Native woman's resistance is grounded in family, community, land, language and spirituality. Her chapter on attitudes of resistance was underdeveloped for the needs of this study, as it focused on women's experiences of being strong and having a sense of humour.

Anderson's work contributes to this study by providing an example of an Aboriginal women researcher using open-ended, qualitative interviews with Aboriginal women and providing an analysis of these from an Aboriginal woman centered perspective. Her analysis is based almost completely on interviews with participants. With little or no theoretical framework guiding her work she allows the women participants to express their experiences and understandings of their experiences. The main differences from my study are the topic and choice of participants. Although negative images of women often arise from or are propagated by government agencies and can be considered acts of dehumanization, my study addresses other aspects of dehumanization. Themes of physical survival, economic dependency and bureaucracy arose in my study and are not directly related to images. Anderson intentionally chooses an influential and exemplary group of community leaders, activists, artists and scholars who displayed a strong Aboriginal identity and a significant degree of cultural competency but may not be representative of all Aboriginal women. Nonetheless, her work provides an example of both

everyday forms of resistance and an Aboriginal women-centered ideological framework based on qualitative interviews with other Aboriginal women.

Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2006) describes and discusses her personal growth as an Anishinaabeg woman through the processes of birth and mothering. She claims these experiences awakened her political and cultural consciousness and her own acts of resistance.<sup>57</sup> For Simpson, the responsibilities of women for future generations are a motivation for personal and collective self-determination. She sees birth and motherhood as one piece of a larger movement to decolonize. According to Simpson: “Reclaiming Indigenous traditions of pregnancy, birth and mothering will enable our children to lead our resurgence as Indigenous peoples, to rise up and rebel against colonialism in all its forms, to dream independence, to dance to nationhood.”<sup>58</sup> For Simpson, resistance stems from an Anishinaabeg spiritual and political philosophical system in which a woman’s social and moral obligations to her children lead her to challenge colonization on their behalf.

Although, the literature on Aboriginal women and resistance is sparse, it demonstrates that Aboriginal women have engaged in resistance against oppression from the early contact era to the present in overt and covert ways. However, none of the literature has focused on everyday acts of resistance by Aboriginal women.

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<sup>57</sup> Leanne Simpson, “Decolonizing Our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies,” in *‘Until Our Hearts Are On the Ground’: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*, eds. D. Meme Lavell-Harvard and Jeanette Corbiere Lavell (Toronto: Demeter, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Simpson, “Decolonizing Our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies,” 32.

## Theoretical Approaches

### Colonialism

To understand the circumstances of contemporary Aboriginal women in Canada, it is necessary to examine the colonial past. Colonization was the establishment and control of colonies by European powers which was firmly established by the 19<sup>th</sup> century when much of the land surface of the earth was controlled by European, or Euro-derived, powers.<sup>59</sup> In the colonial process, European powers settled territories previously occupied by Aboriginal peoples using strategies of assimilation or annihilation.<sup>60</sup> Colonialism also involved and was supported by a complex ideology which supported territorial expansion while dehumanizing and stereotyping the colonized people. According to post-colonial theorists Roger Maaka and Augie Fleras:

As exploitation, colonialism entails a complex system of racial, cultural, and political domination that establishes a hierarchical arrangement between the colonizer and the colonized. The process of colonialism exploits indigenous people, destroys their national society, and displaces aboriginal cultures. In asserting the racial and cultural superiority of the colonizer, colonialism dehumanizes indigenous peoples and renders them dependent by internalizing a sense of inferiority and worthlessness.<sup>61</sup>

This process led to ethnocentrism and the dominance of the colonizers culture at the expense of the colonized. According to post-colonial theorist Robert J. C Young, colonization created ethnocentrism and discrimination when white culture became the basis of legitimate government, law, economics, language, music, art, literature.<sup>62</sup> The colonized are thus dehumanized in the process of colonization.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Neizen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 53.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Maaka and Augie Fleras, *The Politics of Indigeneity: Challenging the State in Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago, 2005), 40.

<sup>62</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 3.

Sociologist James Frideres summarized the process of colonization which begins with the incursion of a powerful group into a geographic territory already occupied by another group of people.<sup>63</sup> The more powerful group then proceeds to govern the original occupants by imposing their own laws, customs, language, and values. This has a destructive effect on the existing social and cultural structures of the Indigenous groups which eventually leads to external political control and economic dependence. The colonizer replaces traditional Aboriginal social institutions with low quality governmental institutions and bureaucratic agencies in areas such as education, health, justice, social services and education. The establishment of a race based ideology supports policy and actions founded on the supposed superiority of the colonizer and the inferiority of the colonized. The ultimate goal is economic benefits for the colonizing group in terms of gaining lands and resources at the least cost. This process is particularly important when contemplating origins of the government agencies and institutions with which Aboriginal women must interact. With this model, governments and their agencies were established to acquire resources from Aboriginal populations rather than to help them.

### **Internalized Colonialism**

Some theorists argue that colonialism becomes accepted and internalized by the colonized. Educator Paulo Freire discusses internalized colonialism as the result of oppression. He argues that since men are dehumanized by oppression, they seek to become human by oppressing others since this is the only definition of humanity they have experienced.<sup>64</sup> Freire explains: “The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them,

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<sup>63</sup> James Frideres, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 3-7.

to be men is to be oppressors.”<sup>65</sup> However, the contradiction between oppressor and oppressed inside the same person creates a duality whereby the oppressed are simultaneously themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.<sup>66</sup> Freire argues that transformation of thought and action is the only remedy for the colonial situation. Internal colonization occurs within this paradigm when the oppressed, having internalized the image of the colonizer begin to colonize themselves. Through examining and discussing the lived experience of colonialism, freedom from colonialism can be realized.

Although there is strong evidence of internal colonization in Aboriginal communities, theorizing resistance is problematic when the colonized are assumed to have accepted and internalized the values of the colonizer as is asserted in the hegemonic model. The Aboriginal elite who benefit from maintaining inequity may have internalized colonization which privileges them at the expense of others in the community.

### **Hegemony**

Hegemony is generally defined as “domination by consent.”<sup>67</sup> The concept of hegemony assumes that the ruling class rules ideologically as well as politically and economically. In this analytical framework, oppression is created and perpetuated through the economy, media and educational institutions rather than through force. Through state and social institutions, the ruling class convinces the oppressed that laws, policies and procedures established by the dominant class are in the best interests of all.<sup>68</sup> When the oppressed accept the rightness of the social order established by the dominant class, even when it disadvantages them, this is

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<sup>64</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

<sup>66</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

<sup>67</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 116.

<sup>68</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 337.



hegemony. According to Scott, hegemony is believed to operate by constraining the thought processes of the powerless. He states:

By creating and disseminating a universe of discourse and the concepts to go with it, by defining the standards of what is true, beautiful, moral, fair, and legitimate, they build a symbolic climate that prevents subordinate classes from thinking their way free.<sup>69</sup>

Hegemony implies that the oppressed classes, having consented to their own domination, do not resist.<sup>70</sup> Scott argues that the illusion of hegemony is created by the public transcript whereby the weak appear to accept their place and respect the powerful. As long as the weak act within bounds of the public transcript, the appearance of hegemony is maintained.

Scott, however, argues that the appearance of hegemony may be stronger than the reality. Scott argues that the oppressed are unlikely to perceive the world in the same manner as the ruling class since their experiential reality differs greatly. They can see though attempts to convince them that all is well. According to Scott: "...the concept of hegemony ignores the extent to which most subordinate classes are able, on the basis of their daily material experience, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology."<sup>71</sup> The belief systems of the oppressor if they are accepted are reinterpreted to be consistent with the interests of the class receiving them. According to Scott: "The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript."<sup>72</sup> "Deviant" interpretations arise among subordinate classes which become private transcripts. The private transcript illustrates the absence of hegemony. The private

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<sup>69</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 39.

<sup>70</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial studies*, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 317.

<sup>72</sup> Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance*, 4.

transcripts contradict hegemonic influence and provide the foundations for resistance to domination by consent.

### **Dehumanization and Stereotypes**

According to Freire, becoming more fully human is the main vocation of humankind. As people become aware of their humanity they also become aware of oppression, either of themselves or others, as a historical reality.<sup>73</sup> This reality of oppression interferes with becoming more fully human for both the oppressor and the oppressed. According to Freire:

“Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.”<sup>74</sup> People seeking to be more fully human must resist the oppression which hinders their progress. As much as oppression leads to dehumanization, resistance restores humanity.

According to Freire: “[Humanity] is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is confirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.”<sup>75</sup> People do not accept oppression because it interferes with the process of becoming more fully human.<sup>76</sup> Dehumanization is a result of oppression. Resistance, therefore, is a human reaction against dehumanization.

Within a structure of dehumanization exists the stereotype of the colonized which is constructed by the colonizer. Freire argues that the oppressed are individualized and treated as deviant and pathological beings rather than as a member of a subjugated class. The perceived deviance becomes affixed as a stereotype of the oppressed. This ideology blames the oppressed for their plight claiming that the oppression is the result of individual character flaws rather than

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<sup>73</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 43.

<sup>74</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

a structure of oppression. According to Freire, the oppressed are typically regarded as incompetent and lazy. Therefore, the oppressed believe they must be integrated and incorporated into the healthy society by changing their mentality.<sup>77</sup> As long as the oppressed believe their marginalized status is due to a personal failure they are not motivated to change the structure of the system that oppresses them. Instead they will either accept themselves as deviant or struggle to overcome character flaws to join the ranks of the oppressor. According to Friere, the oppressed are not marginalized people living ‘outside’ society. Rather they are marginal because they live inside the structure which has made them so. Therefore, the solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, Freire claims that the oppressor will try to appease the oppressed by offering false generosity. This generosity is based on constructed stereotypes and is apparently intended to help the oppressed be alleviating their suffering but in actuality it perpetuates the oppression. According to Freire:

Any attempts to soften the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their ‘generosity,’ the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this ‘generosity,’ which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty.<sup>79</sup>

This is an important theoretical aspect of this study as Aboriginal women are frequently subject to the generosity of the government system as a result of Aboriginal women’s perceived ‘deviant’ qualities such as unemployment, poverty and ill health. Yet, as previously discussed the true nature of government agencies is to acquire resources and power. In order to avoid true

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<sup>76</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 74.

<sup>78</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 74.

<sup>79</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

generosity which might interfere with resource acquisition, agencies have to maintain the appearance of generosity without affecting a true change in the social structure which supports inequality. This is done by giving recipients slightly less than their basic needs require, and then pathologizing their lack of improvement.

### **Decolonization**

Decolonization is the process of ending . This term is typically applied to the mid-twentieth century when Euro-based domination of colonies subsided and European nation states allowed former colonies to become independent. Post-colonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin state:

Decolonization is the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved.<sup>80</sup>

According to anthropologist Ronald Neizen, liberation for Aboriginal people means an honourable relationship with states that surround them, in which land rights, compensation and the ability to exercise self-determination in education, spirituality, economic development, justice, and governance is respected and supported.<sup>81</sup> Decolonization and liberation, ideally, lead to a post-colonial state where Indigenous groups become self-determining peoples. The Aboriginal women in this study have benefited from the process of decolonization and carry out their resistance in a post-colonial era, perhaps better referred to as a neo-colonial era.

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<sup>80</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial studies*, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Neizen, *The Origins of Indigenism*, 18.

## Postcolonialism

Post-colonial theory is not a single discrete theory. Rather, it is description of any theory or set of theories that address colonialism itself or the contemporary and historical social, cultural and political effects of colonialism which are occasionally contradictory.<sup>82</sup> Post-colonialism as a theoretical perspective is used to understand and analyse the contemporary and historical situation of previously colonized people. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

‘Post-colonialism/postcolonialism’ is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre-and post-independence nations and communities.<sup>83</sup>

The resulting analyses and discourses bring forward the previously silenced voices of the colonized and create theoretical structures that contest the previous dominant western ideologies.<sup>84</sup> Post-colonialism challenges unequal distribution of political power and material resources and asserts the right of all people to the same material and cultural well-being.<sup>85</sup> Post-colonialism is about actively seeking change of past political systems and colonial philosophies which led to disparity between the colonizer and the colonized under colonial rule.

Some theorists challenge the notion of post-colonialism arguing that the social, cultural and political effects of colonialism continue. The idea of post-colonialism is not useful to this study because the participants still find themselves in unequal political and socio-economic position and dealing with government institution not suited to their needs. Yet post-colonialism

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<sup>82</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial studies*, 187.

<sup>84</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 2.

sets the stage for discussion of a neo-colonial state where colonial institutions, political systems and philosophies have not been deconstructed but continue in a different form.

### **Neo-colonialism**

The term neo-colonialism signifies a new type of colonialism. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the designation of neo-colonialism was coined to denote the new force of global control operating through local elite.<sup>86</sup> The term stuck a chord with many theorists and was expanded to encompass a broad range of political situations in which colonial control continues in an alternate form. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

The term had been widely used to refer to any and all forms of control of the ex-colonies. Thus, for example, it has been argued by some that the new elites brought to power by independence, and often educated and trained by the colonialist powers, were unrepresentative of the people and even acted as unwitting or even willing agents [] for the former colonial rulers.<sup>87</sup>

The term denotes an official withdrawal of the colonial power and a superficial change in leadership, but a continuation of the colonial system of disparity. According to Maaka and Fleras, neo-colonialism is based on language that promises movement toward decolonizing relationships but fails to dismantle the colonial structures.<sup>88</sup> Neo-colonialism implies that the liberation and self-determination have not been achieved outside the control of a new form of which is implicit to new political structures. According to Maaka and Fleras: “Neo-colonialism revolves around the assumption that indigenous peoples appear to be in control of their destiny but this claim is illusory since hidden agendas continue to frame, control, and constrain

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<sup>86</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial studies*, 64.

<sup>87</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial studies*, 163.

<sup>88</sup> Maaka and Fleras, *The Politics of Indigeneity*, 261.

indigenous activities.”<sup>89</sup> Neo-colonialism, therefore, may be more insidious than colonialism since it is not explicitly manifest but is shrouded in the very structures of new political systems.

The Aboriginal women in this study are operating in a neo-colonial structure which influences their interaction with government agencies. In this structure, women are members of a subaltern culture who are compelled by their poor socio-economic status to become dependent on government systems for access to their basic subsistence need such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care. The rules of the bureaucratic systems on which they depend are constructed by the dominant culture to protect the present social structure. Maaka and Fleas state: “Hidden agendas frame, control and constrain relationships and entitlements. A bias is embedded within the system, with the result that the equal application of even well-intentioned initiatives may have a discriminatory affect on those with specific vulnerabilities.”<sup>90</sup> Yet according to Maaka and Fleras, the government believes the present system to be fundamentally sound and maintains the *status quo* through government policy.<sup>91</sup> The principles of universal liberalism, which assert the basic equality of all people regardless of race or gender, obfuscate the deep inequality present in neo-colonial societies. By continuing to stereotype Aboriginal women as deviant while characterizing neo-colonial institutions as fundamentally beneficial, the dominant culture manifests false generosity through government agencies which are designed to perpetuate inequality rather than alleviate it. The women in this study must negotiate these government systems in order to survive since they are disadvantaged in other means of subsistence such as employment and education.

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<sup>89</sup> Maaka and Fleras, *The Politics of Indigeneity*, 261.

<sup>90</sup> Maaka and Fleras, *The Politics of Indigeneity*, 263.

<sup>91</sup> Maaka and Fleras, *The Politics of Indigeneity*, 262.

## Feminist theory

This project is a work of Aboriginal feminism in that it documents and politicizes the lived experiences of Aboriginal women who are dealing with government agencies as recounted from their own perspectives. Feminism can provide the ideological basis to redress the power imbalance, to increase the self –determination of women, and to reduce the constrictions and restrictions on women’s lives.<sup>92</sup> According to Aboriginal feminist Joyce Green, feminism is an ideology that takes women’s experiences and makes them political typically through processes of organization and of action.<sup>93</sup> She explains further that:

The characteristic of feminism – be it socialist, maternal, radical, liberal, Aboriginal, ecofeminist – is that it takes gender seriously as a social organizing process and, within the context of patriarchal societies, seeks to identify the ways in which women are subordinate to men and how women can be emancipated from this subordination.<sup>94</sup>

Feminism combats gender oppression. Cree/Métis scholar Emma LaRocque explains that:

“Women are politically oppressed when their roles and standing in the political and cultural life of their societies are restricted when compared to men.”<sup>95</sup> As discussed below, some Aboriginal women reject feminism because they charge that it focuses on gender inequality to the exclusion of other forms of inequality based on race or culture. However, Aboriginal women have increasingly begun to formulate a type of feminism that addresses the intersection of colonization, racism and sexism.

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<sup>92</sup> Rhonda Johnson, Winona Stevenson and Donna Greschner, “Peekiskwetan,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 6 (1993): 163.

<sup>93</sup> Green, “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism,” 20.

<sup>94</sup> Green, “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism,” 21.

<sup>95</sup> Emma LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist: Ethical Reflections on Feminism, Human Rights and Decolonization,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green, 53-71 (London: Zed, 2007), 55.



## Aboriginal Feminism

There has been the tendency to reject feminism as a white middle-class phenomenon without meaning for Aboriginal women. According to some scholars, Aboriginal women share an experience based on indigeneity which is unlike that of non-Aboriginal women. According to Moreton-Robinson all Indigenous women share the common experience which is shaped by the following themes:

They include sharing an inalienable connection to the land; a legacy of dispossession, racism and sexism; resisting and replacing disparaging images of ourselves with self-defined images; continuing our activism as mothers, sisters, daughters, grandmothers and community leaders, as well as negotiating sexual politics across and within cultures.<sup>96</sup>

She asserts that whiteness itself confers privilege and dominance in power relations and, at times, white women were complicit in oppressing Aboriginal women. According to Moreton-Robinson an effect of white women theorizing about sex and gender differences was the creation of the archetypal woman who is white, middle-class, and heterosexual and oppressed solely by patriarchy. Therefore, the forms of feminism produced by them are all but useless to Aboriginal women.

Significant resistance to feminist ideology exists within the Aboriginal community. Some claim that Aboriginal women themselves are not interested in feminism due to their indigeneity. According to Cree scholar Grace Ouellette: "Feminist theories are incompatible with Aboriginal women's beliefs and theories of multi-oppression, with their conceptions of human nature, and with their strategies for liberation"<sup>97</sup> Others claim that hostility to feminism exists within the Aboriginal community as a whole and the anti-feminist pressures which exist in the non-

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<sup>96</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, xvi.

<sup>97</sup> Grace Ouellette, *The Fourth World: An Indigenous Perspective On Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Activism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2002), 26.

Aboriginal community are amplified for Aboriginal feminists through processes of colonization.

Green states:

In such a relationship, there are very powerful impulses structuring internal allegiances and sustaining traditional social practices of authenticity, resistance and solitary in the face of colonial assimilative forces...Indeed, feminist analysis is widely considered to be divisive, corrosive of family and community, culturally inappropriate and even colonialist.<sup>98</sup>

These attitudes were summed up by M. Annette Jaimes, an early anti-feminist Indigenous scholar.

While Jaimes applauded women activists as long as they identify only as Aboriginal people, she states: "In each instance, native women – as *Indians*, first, last, and always – have asserted their traditional right and assumed their traditional responsibility of standing at the very center of the fray."<sup>99</sup> Jaimes argues that feminist activity by Aboriginal women is to the detriment of sovereignty and nationhood and is therefore a sign of assimilation. According to Jaimes: "It should be noted, however, that those who have most openly identified themselves in this fashion have tended to be among the more assimilated of Indian women activists..."<sup>100</sup> She goes on to state that Aboriginal feminists are generally accepting of the colonial ideology and even anti-sovereignist.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the author states, no devoted Aboriginal women would consider feminism as a legitimate avenue to pursue.

Aboriginal feminist educator Verna St. Denis (2007) provides a list of the most cited reasons that feminism is discounted as a valid framework for addressing the concerns of Aboriginal women..<sup>101</sup> The first argument is that Aboriginal societies once were and to some extent remain egalitarian. The second argument is that women and motherhood were always

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<sup>98</sup> Green, "Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism," 25.

<sup>99</sup> Jaimes, "American Indian Woman," 331.

<sup>100</sup> Jaimes, "American Indian Woman," 331.

<sup>101</sup> Verna St. Denis, "Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity," in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green, 33-52 (London: Zed, 2007).

honoured in Aboriginal society. The third argument is that equality was never an Aboriginal concept and, therefore, does not apply to Aboriginal people.<sup>102</sup> The fourth argument is that attaining gender equality is the same as attaining white, male power which is not desirable to begin with.<sup>103</sup> The fifth argument is that a return to tradition social structures will remedy all disharmony between genders. The final argument is that gender inequality is nothing compared to racism.<sup>104</sup> The argument against feminism is a historically significant argument that has affected research philosophy for Aboriginal women by excluding feminisms as a valid framework for analysis.

In spite of these arguments, St. Denis insists that feminism is not static or homogenous; rather it is varied, debated and dynamic. There are multiple forms of feminism some of which are more relevant to Aboriginal women than others. As its foremost benefit, feminism offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of western patriarchy including an understanding of how inequality and unequal social, political and economic relations have been justified, rationalized and practiced by the dominant culture.<sup>105</sup> The reality is that gender inequality presently exists and needs to be directly dealt with in order to address all forms inequality and marginalization which affect Aboriginal women. Scholars such as St. Denis and LaRocque argue that regardless of the status of women in pre-contact Aboriginal societies, Aboriginal people now live in a western capitalistic and patriarchal society which creates the social, economic and political inequality that irrevocably shapes their lives. According to LaRocque:

While there are some notable exceptions in history, such as some semi-matriarchal societies among Indigenous people, and while we can pinpoint

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<sup>102</sup> St. Denis, "Feminism is for Everybody," 38.

<sup>103</sup> St. Denis, "Feminism is for Everybody," 39.

<sup>104</sup> St. Denis, "Feminism is for Everybody," 40.

<sup>105</sup> St. Denis, "Feminism is for Everybody," 43.

colonization as the major factor in our present situation, it remains true that we presently live under structures that proscribe or marginalize our lives.<sup>106</sup>

This reality must be acknowledged and addressed for conditions to change.<sup>107</sup>

bell hooks (2000), a black activist who discusses feminism and black women, agrees that feminism was used by middle-class, white women as a tool for them to access the patriarchy. She claims that while white women were concerned about their own oppression as women, they were not concerned about the oppression of women by racism or classism. hooks argues that white women were often complicit with white men in the oppression of women of colour.<sup>108</sup> hooks claims that race and class, as well as sex, determine which individuals will be oppressed and that making women equal to men will not work since all men are not equal. Black women, in particular, did not seek equality with black men since black men were also oppressed. She states: “Knowing that men in their groups do not have social, political and economic power, they would not deem it libratory to share their social status.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, she claims that bourgeois opportunists have used feminism for their own purposes. She claims: “That revolutionary ideology can be created only if the experiences of people on the margins who suffer sexist oppression and other forms of group oppression are understood, addressed, and incorporated.”<sup>110</sup> hooks argues that black women activists must be committed to the struggle against all forms of oppression. She states: “Our emphasis must be on cultural transformation: destroying dualism, eradicating systems of domination.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Aboriginal women have

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<sup>106</sup> LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist,” 54.

<sup>107</sup> St. Denis, “Feminism is for Everybody,” 47.

<sup>108</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000).

<sup>109</sup> hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 19.

<sup>110</sup> hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 163.

<sup>111</sup> hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 165.

begun to develop modern philosophies, rooted in Aboriginal philosophies, which challenge all forms of oppression.

Recently Aboriginal women scholars have taken another look at feminism and its application for Aboriginal women. These women for the most part dispute the idea that feminism and the pursuit of sovereignty are mutually exclusive and that a return to Aboriginal nationhood will remedy all present inequality. St. Denis argues that feminism is as valid for Aboriginal woman as any other form of western knowledge. She argues that Aboriginal women utilize other forms of western knowledge, theory and analysis, and even seek educational credentials from western institutions, yet still may disapprove and reject feminism.<sup>112</sup> Marlene McKay's (2005) Master's of Education thesis uses feminist theory as an analysis of patriarchy and social constructionism to examine the continuing marginalization of Aboriginal women.<sup>113</sup> She explores how the ideology and practices of patriarchy and male dominance were modeled and imposed through colonization and assimilation and became internalized in Aboriginal societies. She argues that feminism may be a source of empowerment for Aboriginal women if feminist philosophies are modified to address the forms of oppression experienced by women from non-dominant cultures and backgrounds.

Green (2007) argues: "that the emerging Aboriginal feminist literature and politics...must be taken seriously as a critique of colonialism, decolonization and gendered and racialized power relations in both settler and Indigenous communities"<sup>114</sup> She asserts that Aboriginal feminism is, theoretically and politically, a powerful critique of the contemporary social, economic, cultural and political conditions of contemporary Aboriginal women's lives. Furthermore, she makes a

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<sup>112</sup> St. Denis, "Feminism is for Everybody," 34.

<sup>113</sup> Marlene McKay, *Engaging Feminism: A Pedagogy for Aboriginal Peoples* (Master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2005).

distinction between Aboriginal feminists and other women who advance a feminist ideology. Aboriginal feminists are concerned with more than simply women's issues. They address the intersection of colonialism, racism and sexism as they apply to Aboriginal women.<sup>115</sup> She also argues that intolerance for feminist analysis is problematic especially when taking the form of intimidation in the political area when Aboriginal women's rights and political agendas are usurped by those of Aboriginal male leadership. Green concludes that Aboriginal feminism is one of a range of ways to address oppression manifest in the forms of imperialism, colonialism, racism and sexism experiences by Aboriginal women from within and with-out the Aboriginal community in a manner compatible with feminism, post-colonial theory and critical race theory.

Emma Larocque (2007) argues that racism and sexism are the results of colonization which are embedded in present Aboriginal societies and must be addressed for decolonization to occur. Her analysis is based on the present situation of Aboriginal women within contemporary Aboriginal cultures. She points out that nationhood claims may be based on unproven assumptions of the previous and present existence of idealized equality. According to LaRocque: "There is an over-riding assumption that Aboriginal traditions were universally historically non-sexist and therefore, are universally liberating today."<sup>116</sup> She cites evidence that not all cultures were non-sexist and may not be liberating for all women if restored in their previous forms. Nor can rebuilding societies take precedence over alleviating present problems. According to LaRocque: "There is no question that we need to rebuild and restore ourselves and our cultures. However, this cannot mean that we refrain from confronting patriarchal and sexist attitudes or

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<sup>114</sup> Green, "Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism," 21.

<sup>115</sup> Green, "Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism," 20.

<sup>116</sup> LaRocque, "Métis and Feminist," 65.

oppressive behaviours.”<sup>117</sup> Therefore, LaRocque examines the present situation of Aboriginal women with some concern regarding the present distribution of power in Aboriginal communities. According to LaRocque, it is a concern that Native women are honoured as keepers of tradition while Native men control political power, and that Aboriginal women will accept these fundamental inequalities in the name of Aboriginal rights.<sup>118</sup> LaRocque disputes the notion that Aboriginal women must be content to be Aboriginal first and women second in order to provide national political unity as Aboriginal nations decolonize. According to LaRocque: “Racism/sexism is a package experience and it is virtually impossible to untangle one from the other. But the integrity of my sexuality and my body will not be sacrificed for race, for religion, for ‘difference,’ for ‘culture’ or for ‘nation’.”<sup>119</sup> She insists that decolonization must fully address the intertwining issues of sexism and racism to be truly emancipating for Aboriginal people. According to LaRocque: “...no injustice against any persons, whether constitutional, cultural or physical/sexual, should ever be tolerated in the name of advancing any collective or political interests, even when idealized as some kind of a decolonizing reconstructive process.”<sup>120</sup> In the final analysis, LaRocque asserts that an end to sexism must be a part of decolonization, not a result of it.

Similarly, Andrea Smith (2007) examines the importance of developing theories and practices that focus on the intersections of colonial and gender violence in relation to Native women’s activism.<sup>121</sup> Smith asserts that feminism and Aboriginal sovereignty are not mutually

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<sup>117</sup> LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist,” 65.

<sup>118</sup> LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist,” 68.

<sup>119</sup> LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist,” 67.

<sup>120</sup> LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist,” 68.

<sup>121</sup> Andrea Smith, “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green, 93-107 (London: Zed, 2007).

exclusive and women of colour have unjustly been presented with choosing between racial justice or gender justice. According to Smith:

...there is not necessarily a relationship between the extent to which Native women call themselves feminist, the extent to which they work in coalition with non-Native feminists or value those coalitions, whether they are urban or reserve based, and the extent to which they are 'genuinely sovereigntist.'<sup>122</sup>

To Smith gender inequality is inseparable from the issue of colonization and therefore, cannot be dealt with separately. According to Smith, gender justice is an issue of survival for Indigenous peoples since decolonization cannot take place without addressing sexism. Smith argues that sovereignty and gender equality are not necessarily dichotomous or mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, Aboriginal women can contribute to feminist theory as well as benefit from them.

The usefulness of a distinctly female Aboriginal analysis of modern resistance cannot be underestimated. Such an analysis would fall firmly into the realm of Aboriginal feminism. Such an examination would examine the lived experience of being an Aboriginal woman involved with oppressive government services and the types of resistance manifest as a result of that subjective experience.

### **Summary**

Resistance is often theorized as asserting rights through collective action, political activity or court proceedings, yet most Aboriginal women do not take part in these forms of resistance on a regular basis. James C. Scott has described everyday forms of resistance based on the interrelationship spoken and unspoken interactions between and within groups of people which he calls public and private transcripts. Scott claims public transcripts are official and overt interactions between an oppressor and the oppressed that meet the needs of the dominant group

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<sup>122</sup> Smith, "Native American Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change," 95.



by legitimizing their dominance and reinforcing the social order that they have constructed. Yet, each group has a private transcript, hidden from the other, which questions the effectiveness, authenticity or legitimacy of the social order. It is the private transcript of the oppressed that provides the ideological basis for resistance and occasionally surfaces during times of extreme conflict. The subtle influence of the private transcript leads to small and regularly occurring acts of resistance.

There is a growing literature on resistance in general and Aboriginal resistance in particular as well as a vast body of literature on feminism. It is at the intersection of women's literature and Aboriginal literature that that gap exists, and works which address Aboriginal women's resistance outside the political and legal realms are lacking. Feminist literature on everyday resistance does not include an Aboriginal viewpoint, while the literature on Aboriginal resistance is not gender specific. The literature that does exist demonstrates that Aboriginal women's resistance is often separate from men's and, that while women engage in resistance that benefits their communities, they also have gender specific struggles. Aboriginal women's everyday resistance as a culture and gender specific phenomenon has been underrepresented in the literature. The single study, by Anderson, of Aboriginal woman's resistance to negative images of themselves which addresses resistance on a daily and individual level is not sufficient to address this important aspect of Aboriginal women's lives.

Existing (post/neo)colonial and Aboriginal feminist theory provide a fragmentary basis for understanding the present situation of Aboriginal women. An Aboriginal feminist approach may be suitable framework for basing an understanding of Aboriginal woman's resistance as coming from a place of being both Aboriginal and female in a post/neocolonial society. This

literature positions Aboriginal women in a unique place with unique challenges, as Aboriginal and female persons, which highlights the need to 'look within' for new ways of understanding.

This literature review shows that rudimentary basis for analysis is available using existing literature. Nonetheless, the absence of comprehensive literature makes the creation of an Aboriginal woman-centred study all the more necessary. Gaps in the literature signify an absence of literature on Aboriginal women's lived experience in present times. The literature overlooks resistance which is not immediately obvious to the dominant society and therefore, minimizes important aspects of Aboriginal women existence. Unfortunately, even Aboriginal feminist literature has not examined everyday resistance outside a legal and political context. Furthermore, Aboriginal feminism is moot if it only exists only in discussions of theories about whether it should exist. Without concrete applications, Aboriginal feminism is useless to Aboriginal women. This study begins to use Aboriginal feminism as a framework for a study into the concrete, existential experiences of Aboriginal women. Thus, the remainder of the study addresses the need to develop new ways of understanding Indigenous women's everyday forms of resistance by attempting to develop new theoretical frameworks for analyses arising out of the unique experiences of Indigenous women.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The research methods which best suited the study of resistance to government oppression by urban Aboriginal women in the Saskatoon area are grounded theory and oral history. For reasons explained below they were identified as the most appropriate and useful tools to work with the women in this urban Aboriginal community. The first section of this chapter discusses the usefulness of these methods and addresses some of the major criticisms levied against oral history. The second section discusses and describes the applications of these methods, or how the project research and analysis was conducted. This section also includes an overview of the project methodologies including interview methods, ethical concerns, recruitment, community feedback, transcription methods and analysis.

### **Theory**

#### **Grounded Theory**

##### **Definition**

In the discipline of Native Studies, academics are urged to bridge the gap between Aboriginal philosophies and academic theories. Native Studies scholars search for methods and theories that can accommodate Aboriginal knowledge and experience in a respectful manner whilst remaining within the bounds of the academy. Sociologists Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss founded the technique of ‘Discovery of Grounded Theory’ as an inductive theory building technique that constructs theory based on data. The Discovery of Grounded is based on the notion that the researcher comes to the research without a hypothesis or a preconceived notions. According to Corbin and Strauss: “A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived

from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon.”<sup>1</sup> The researcher then forms conclusions and hypothesis from the data collected during the research. This inductive form of research is useful because often there are no theories in the academy which reflect Aboriginal understandings and worldviews. Discovery of Grounded Theory allows for formation of theory from research with Aboriginal participants.

Grounded theory is conducted by doing qualitative interviews about discrete events, situations and happening. The data is coded into conceptual categories and sub-categories. The researcher looks for relationships between conceptual categories and possible causal connections, consequences, action/interactions, intervening conditions and context. The categories are recombined based on these insights to create new meanings or theories. In grounded theory the research question is necessarily broad enough to encompass an entire phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Value of Grounded Theory in this Study**

The theory creation process used in grounded theory is useful to this project because it allows the researcher to move beyond cultural and disciplinary boundaries to explain the experiential reality of the Aboriginal women in this study, who generally sit at the margins of the dominant society and academic thought. Given the small size of this study, it would not be possible to develop a completely tenable theory based on grounded theory. Nonetheless, for my interviews I have used a grounded theory approach to support the emergence of an Aboriginal woman-centred framework from the data. The discovery of grounded theory allows the

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<sup>1</sup>Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1994), 23.

researcher to temporarily suspend (as much as possible) assumptions about the research topic and permits Aboriginal women's voices to arise from the data. In this method, theory and literature are secondary to the research data and may be modified or discarded if not supported by the data. An existing theory, or other analytical framework, will be applied only if it fits the data, and then only so much as is justifiable from the data. This form of inductive approach is necessary since most academic frameworks and literature have not been produced by Aboriginal communities and may not be compatible with Aboriginal understandings or the research question. When theory is non-existent or inadequate, new theory is created to fill the void. The grounded theory approach puts as much weight, if not more, on interview data as it does on theory or literature, and therefore seems ideal for research on a topic which is not adequately represented in either.

## **Oral History**

### **Definition**

The primary data collection method used in this study was oral history interviews. These interviews provided the data which was used in the grounded theory approach. Most authors agree that oral history is the formal recording of the spoken memory of experiences. According to oral historian Donald A. Ritchie, "Memory is the core of oral history, from which meaning can be extracted and preserved. Simply put, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews."<sup>3</sup> Some scholars define oral history narrowly as the recorded results of a qualitative interview. Oral historian Alice Hoffman states, "Oral history may be defined as a process of collecting, usually by means of a tape-

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<sup>2</sup> Corbin and Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

<sup>3</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 20.

recorded interview, reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of events from the recent past which are of historical significance.”<sup>4</sup> Others assert a broader definition in which oral history encompasses a broad range of oral documents. Oral historian James Hoopes states, “Oral history is based on documents that are spoken and folklore and legend are only one kind of spoken document. Songs, speeches, interviews, and formal and informal conversation are all oral documents, useful for history.”<sup>5</sup> Both of these definitions are suitable for use in this study.

Unlike conventional documentary history, oral history is conducted with living participants. One advantage of oral history is that it is an interactive method between interviewer and interviewee. The researcher is able to solicit particular focus and direction in the interview process and receive immediate answers. According to Hoopes, “The greatest advantage of oral history over written documents is that the historian actively participates, as interviewer, in creating the oral document, and therefore he can try to get the information he needs.”<sup>6</sup> This is unlike other oral or written documents where a specific theme must be drawn from documents created for another purpose. The interview is conducted specifically for the purpose of recording the target information which then undergoes analyses and interpretation.

Since oral history is based on relationships with living human beings, it implies relations between the researcher, the participant and their larger social environments. Oral historian Ronald Grele identifies three sets of relationships within oral history, one internal and two external. The first addresses the internal cohesion of the oral document and unites the words to

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<sup>4</sup> Alice Hoffman, “Reliability and Validity in Oral History,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 87-93 (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1996), 88.

<sup>5</sup> James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina, 1979), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Hoopes, *Oral History*, 12.

one another to create a whole. The second set addresses the relationships created by interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee. According to Grele:

When we interview someone, he not only speaks to himself and to the interviewer, but he also speaks through the interviewer to the larger community and its history as he views it...There are seemingly two relationships contained in one – that between the informant and the historian, and that between the informant and his own historical consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the women interviewed wanted their stories public and made statements about their experiences which they intended to be part of the record. They wanted their stories heard by the researcher and by a larger audience as well.

### **The Value of Oral History Interviews in this Study**

Oral history as a method rose to scholarly prominence as part of “the struggle to produce a history from below.”<sup>8</sup> One of the initial purposes of oral history was to bring forward a history that had, until then, been absent from the mainstream historical record which predominantly focused on Great Men and national histories. Historians realized that the majority of recorded, written history was produced by an elite group of politicians, ruler, scholars and affluent, mostly rich, Western European men. Ritchie explains, “When historians came to realize that women and racial and ethnic minorities were missing from the pages of most history texts, oral historians recorded their voices to construct a more diverse and accurate portrait of the past.”<sup>9</sup> Some feminist writers have embraced oral history methods because it is a tool which can empower

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald J. Grele, “Movement without aim: Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history,” in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 38-52 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald J. Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, 33-91 (Toronto: Altamira, 2007), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 14.

women and give them voice. Feminist Sherna Gluck asserts that oral history is useful because it brings voice to women who would otherwise have their histories unrecorded. She states:

Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, women are creating a new history – using our own voices and experiences. We are challenging the traditional concepts of history, of what is “historically important,” and we are affirming that our everyday lives are history. Using an oral tradition, as old as human memory, we are reconstructing our own past.<sup>10</sup>

Oral history is important to capture the life experiences of those who do not, for whatever reason, have the time and ability to write their memoirs or those whose memoirs, when written, would not likely enter into mainstream historical records. This study affirms that the everyday lives of the Aboriginal women are historically important, and that their resistance will become a part of the new history described by Gluck.

With the exception of notes or letters which they themselves have written, very little of the information kept on the women in this study was written by them. Doubtless, there are a significant number of records about urban Aboriginal women housed in the government agencies that these women encounter on a regular basis. However, most of these records were manufactured for the use of government agencies and likely contain little of the perspectives of the clients. According to Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson:

While interviews with members of social and political elites have complemented existing documentary sources, the most distinctive contribution of oral history has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been ‘hidden from history’, perhaps written about by social observers or in official documents, but only rarely preserved in personal papers or scraps of autobiographical writing.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Sherna Gluck, “What’s So Special About Women?: Women’s Oral History,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 215-230 (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1996), 216.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, “Introduction,” in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 1-8 (New York: Routledge, 1998), ix.



As a research method developed for inclusion of minority interests, oral history is well-suited for research with urban Aboriginal women.

Oral history is particularly important to locate a dissenting view in the everyday lives of Aboriginal women since the information kept by government agencies would primarily hold the meaning assigned to it by the agency and the agency worker responsible for its manufacture. It would be devoid of the interpretations of events and human relationships as these are understood by the clients. Perks and Thomson explain further: "More specifically, interviews have documented specific aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources, such as personal relations, domestic work or family life, and they have resonated with the subjective or personal meanings of lived experience."<sup>12</sup> Through the use of oral history this study allows the reminiscences of urban Aboriginal women to become part of the historical record.

### **Oral History Challenges and Criticisms**

Two significant criticisms of oral history address the reliability and the validity of the oral testimony. Hoffman states: "reliability can be defined as the consistency with which an individual will tell the same story about the same events on a number of different occasions. Validity refers to the degree of conformity between the reports of the event and the event itself as recorded by other primary resource material such as documents, photographs, diaries and letters."<sup>13</sup> Scholars are concerned that stories change over time due to a number of factors including memory and audience while written documents, although likewise subject to interpretation, are in and of themselves objective and unchanging. Furthermore, there is significant concern when information

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<sup>12</sup> Perks and Thomson, "Introduction," ix.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History," 89.

from oral history is not consistent with that of other sources. Some claim that oral history is less likely to be accurate since it consists of stories and not facts. Other historians such as Jan Vansina, claim that oral history is no more or less likely to have inaccuracies than any other source, including documents. Vansina explains, "...[O]ral traditions are historical sources which can provide reliable information about the past if they are used with all the circumspection demanded by the application of historical methodology to any kind of source whatsoever."<sup>14</sup> In this research, oral history is treated as a primary source as valid and credible as any other documentary source.

Some historians do not dispute the fact that oral history is not always factual, but claim that the truth is nonetheless presented. According to oral historian Alessandro Portelli:

Then importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no false oral sources. Once we checked their factual credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true' and that this truth may be equally important as factually reliable accounts.<sup>15</sup>

The foremost goal of oral history is not based on the pursuit of an objective truth which can be documented and validated, although this is one consideration. Rather, for the purposes of this study the primary goal is to discover the subjective truth of the participants. This project is qualitative research, and therefore delves into the subjective quality of the participants' interactions with government agencies as they understand them with a focus on manifestations of

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Vansina, "Oral Tradition and Historical Method," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 121-125 (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1996), 123.

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What makes oral history different?" in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 63-74 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 68.

oppression and resistance. The quality of their resistance cannot be ascertained or verified by collecting facts, since it constructed from their experiences, realities and perspectives.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Overview**

This project consisted of three separate but interconnected data collection phases: a series of individual interviews, focus groups and interviews with Elders. The first phase was a series of eleven interviews with Aboriginal women from Saskatoon representing a wide range of Aboriginal identities and ages. During the second phase, I conducted two focus groups with the women from the original interviews to present my analyses of the interview results and solicit feedback. Feedback from the women participants was necessary to verify that my results were consistent with their understanding of their experiences and that my presentation of their realities was acceptable. The third phase consisted of interviews with two Elders living in the Saskatoon area. In these interviews I presented the results of my analysis and solicited feedback from them. I turned to these Elders because they had more experiential knowledge and greater cultural awareness than myself. The feedback of Elders was necessary because Elders are esteemed in Aboriginal cultures as the keepers and purveyors of wisdom, knowledge and history. Therefore, their insights represent a valuable resource which I would be remiss to overlook.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Each phase of research had its own ethical procedures. The consent for interviews with Aboriginal women participants was given verbally and digitally recorded. The University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board approved the use of a consent script in lieu of a written consent form because signing of documents could have been a concern for some participants,

particularly those with low literacy skills. I read the written version of the informed consent form to each participant [See Appendix A - Consent Script (Aboriginal Woman Participants)] and asked for their verbal consent before the interview began. Each participant was also given the written record of the Consent Script for their own records. They were also informed of their right to withdraw consent at any time without negative consequence. Verbal assent and participation in the interview implied informed consent. The interview recordings and notes do not have the participants name recorded or associated with it in any way. Rather, each interview is catalogued according to pseudonyms beginning with the first eleven letters of the alphabet in the order that the women were interviewed. That is, the first participant is called Arladene, the second is called Bernadette and so on.

The consent for focus groups was given by a written consent form [See Appendix B – Consent Form (Focus Groups)]. The ethics board indicated that a written consent form was more appropriate because asking each woman to state her name and provide verbal consent would breach the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. I read the informed consent form and asked for their signature consent before the focus groups began. Each participant was given copy for their own records. They were also informed of their right to withdraw consent at any time without consequence. They were asked to keep the focus group discussion confidential but they were also informed that confidentiality may be a concern because I could not guarantee the conduct of individual members of the group. The focus group recordings and notes do not have the participants names recorded or associated with them in any way. Rather, each focus group participant is identified by a pseudonym beginning with the first six letters of the alphabet in the order they first spoke: Anna, Bertha and Clare in Focus Group 1 and Darlene, Emma and Florence in Focus Group 2.

As with the first set of interviews, the consent for interviews with Elders was given verbally and digitally recorded. The ethics board approved the use of a consent script in lieu of a written consent for the Elders because it was thought that Elders versed in oral traditions may be leery of signing written forms. The researcher read the written version of the informed consent form to each Elder [See Appendix C – Consent Script (Elders)] and asked for their verbal consent before the interview began. Each Elder was also informed of their right to withdraw consent at any time without negative consequences and was given copy of the consent script for their own records. Verbal assent and participation in the interview implied informed consent. The Elders are identified by their personal names because the identity of an Elder gives an indication of their authority to speak on a matter. Also, the authority of an Elder is such that their knowledge should be attributed to them rather than appropriated by the researcher without giving credit. Since the Elders are not asked to provide private or compromising information, there are no confidentiality concerns when naming them.

Research data includes the digital recordings and transcripts. I had originally intended to take written notes at the interview but ended up not doing so because it seemed inappropriate. Given the context it seemed like something a social worker would do at a child protection investigation. My goal was to make the interviews as non-threatening as possible. Since the interview was interactive, all actions during the interview became a part of the record and affected its quality. According to Gluck,

Stopping to take notes signifies to her either that what she is saying is not very important and that you do not have to listen, or that it is very important and you are taking notes in order to ask her more about it. In any event, the loss of eye contact, even for a brief moment, the break in the pattern of concentrated listening, can be very disruptive.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gluck, “What’s So Special About Women?,” 226.

Taking handwritten notes in this study was rejected because of its potentially disruptive and disrespectful impact. Interviews and focus groups were recorded with a small digital audio recording device.

Risks associated with this study included potential loss of anonymity and confidentiality to the participants and to third parties to whom they referred. There was the potential social risk to personal reputations and/or legal repercussions in the event that the resistance stories contained descriptions of activities that could be construed as socially unacceptable or illegal. Although somewhat sensitive in nature, the questions were open-ended so participants were in control of the amount of information they divulged. An additional concern was that this research could indirectly harm participants or other Aboriginal women by revealing too much which could potentially inform government agency policy change that might be retaliatory, punitive or otherwise detrimental to the participants.

## **Interview process**

### **Recruitment**

I originally proposed to interview ten Aboriginal women but I interviewed a total of eleven in case one needed to be excluded from the study for any reason. I recruited women by posters [See Appendix D - Recruitment Poster] and word of mouth (snowballing method). The participant selection criterion was that women self-identify as Aboriginal and have resistance stories that they are willing to share. Age, constitutional status or area of residence was not an issue because, at the beginning of this study, it was not known if these factors would significantly affect their involvement with government agencies. I determined that if there were significant factors that affected their involvement, these would emerge through the data. I placed posters in community agencies and educational institutions frequented by Aboriginal people.

Agencies included the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, The Saskatoon Literacy Centre, the Friendship Inn, Tamara's House, Quint Housing, The Family Circle Healing Lodge, The First Nations Child Development Centre, the Saskatoon Native Theatre Company, White Buffalo Youth Lodge, the Saskatoon Tribal Council Office and the West Side Community Clinic. Before I posted, I asked permission from the agency. All but one was positive and supportive of the research. Posters were also placed around the University of Saskatchewan, the First Nations University of Canada and the Gabriel Dumont Institute. I did not initiate contact with participants but waited for interested women to approach me. The women were provided with a \$20 honorarium for their participation. This monetary gift was intended to provide an incentive for their participation and to partially compensate them for their time and contribution to the study.

The snowball method I used was to simply ask participants to give my phone number to others who may be interested in participating. Of the eleven women, six responded to posters at community agencies. Three participants found out about my research through a family member and two were previously acquaintances of mine that expressed an interest in taking part in the study. I conducted all the interviews in Saskatoon.

Of the six women recruited through the posters, four were from the Westside Community Clinic, one was from the Saskatoon Literacy Centre and one from the non-governmental organization, Equal Justice for All. With the exception of the two women previously known to me, there was no response from any Aboriginal women who were not experiencing difficult circumstances. Significantly, there was no response from the posters placed at the educational institutions, places where one would suppose that academic research would be supported.

Perhaps these women did not feel that they had stories to share or perhaps there was insufficient incentive for them to participate in the interview process.

The two women known to me had university degrees and were living in improved circumstances. Although they volunteered to be interviewed, both had some initial hesitancy but concluded that the interview questions did applied to them. They initially did not see themselves as being significantly involved with government systems. However, during the course of the interviews their narratives turned to the difficulties they encountered which arose from working for the government or obtaining treaty entitlements. By contrast, the other nine participants quickly launched into stories about their involvement with government agencies and focused more on meeting basic needs and dealing with abuse, harassment and loss of personal rights. Although the open-ended questions in the interviews were broad enough to allow responses of positive experiences with government agencies and institution, all stories emphasized negative aspects of involvement.

### **The Interviewees/Participants**

All interview participants self-identified as First Nations except one who self-identified as Métis. They ranged in age from nineteen years old to mid-sixties. All the participants were mothers who had between one and twelve children. Two had adult children living independently and were also grandmothers who were involved raising grandchildren at some point. The rest had younger children who were living with them (or would be if they were not in care) and a few were also grandmothers. With the exception of the two participants personally known to me who had university degrees, the participants were in difficult social and economic circumstances. Seven of these nine were receiving government financial assistance, one was receiving educational funding and one had no source of income at the time of the interview. Seven of the



eleven participants had contact with social services which resulted in at least one child being placed in care at some point. Of these seven, two were in foster care as children and two went to residential school. The other three did not discuss whether or not they had been removed from their biological families. Ten of the women lived on the west side of Saskatoon and six of them lived in what is considered the urban core of the city. One participant had previously lived on the west side of Saskatoon but was presently living in her community and visiting Saskatoon at the time of the interview. The socio-economic position of the participants provide a strong backdrop and indication of contemporary resistance strategies used by Aboriginal women who presently live and struggle with government institutions and agencies at a subsistence level. While quantitative data on their socio-economic conditions were not solicited for this study, the socio-economic data that was voluntarily provided by the participants indicate that socio-economics plays a large role in the nature and extent of resistance these women engaged in. Chapter 4 more fully discusses the struggles in obtaining subsistence needs as reported by the participants.

## **Interviews**

For this project, the interviews were between thirty minutes and three hours in length with the average interview being slightly over an hour long. Seven interviews took place in the participants' homes, two took place in restaurants, one in the participant's office in a community agency and one in my home. The question to participants was open-ended and designed to elicit resistance stories: "Do you have any stories about times when you were dealing with the government and found yourself in dire, desperate circumstances and found a way out of them?" Follow up questions such as: "And then what happened?" were used to draw out the full story.

An interview is a purposeful guided interaction between interviewer and the interviewee where the interviewer strives to be attune to the needs of the interviewee. According to Gluck:

The ideal interviewer is there primarily to provide a broad leeway in which to help the interviewee structure her recollections, sensitivity to both individual idiosyncrasies and class or culturally determined characteristics might lead to more direct questioning in some cases and total silence in others.<sup>17</sup>

The interviewer must be aware of the needs of the participants to allow the participant to express themselves as fully as possible. I tried to use cues such as hesitation, inflection, tone and body language to judge the participants' needs during the interviews.

### **Community Feedback Process**

The focus groups and interviews with the Elders were intended to verify the accuracy and appropriateness of my results. This was done by presenting the participants with my interpretation of their stories for their feedback. The focus group feedback was especially important for feedback on the analytical language I used, for example, forms of oppression and resistance strategies. The goal was to ensure that the results of the research were consistent with the participants' experiences.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus Group 1 took place in a classroom at the Saskatoon Literacy Centre which is located in the area where the participants lived. For the focus groups, I attempted to contact all the participants. There was a six month lapse between interviews and focus groups during which I transcribed and analysed the data. Of the eleven, one had left town and I e-mailed her a copy of two chapters. I was able to contact seven of the remaining ten participants by phone and all stated their intention to attend. I sent letters to three of the participants who did not have phones. Only one of the original participants attended but she brought two friends. I had previously met

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<sup>17</sup> Gluck, "What's So Special About Women?," 225.

one of the friends while working on a different research project. We sat on chairs arranged in a circle with the digital recorder in the middle. Each women was offered an honorarium and refreshments

Focus Group 2 was held at the Rainbow Community Centre which was also in the neighbourhood that the participants lived in and they were again offered an honorarium and refreshments. I attempted contact all the participants a second time, this time visiting the houses of those I had contacted by mail previously. Two had moved from the places they had lived and three said that they could not attend. Two of the original participants attended and one female family member attended. I met this new participant before in a social setting and so was acquainted with her. We sat around a large table and the digital recorder was placed in the centre of the table. There were three children present at the focus group who played amongst themselves interrupting from time to time so there was background noise and distraction during the focus group. All of the participants were used to young children so I do not believe the quality or scope of the discussion were affected. They just kept talking over the noise.

The results of the focus groups are the responses from six Aboriginal women, three who were original participants and three new participants. In order to accommodate the new participants, I gave a thorough explanation of the interview process which produced the results and answered any questions before discussing the results.

In each group, I began by presenting an overview of the research and then discussing the main themes of dehumanization, resistance and giving-back to the community. I discussed each theme separately, asking for feedback on each and then asked for general feed-back on the research findings as a whole. The participants were positive and enthusiastic about the research, and in agreement with my results. Their feedback emphasized certain aspects of the research

which resonated with them and is reflected in Chapter 6. In addition to feedback, the participants continued to share stories of their experiences with government agencies. After I explained the concepts of dehumanization and resistance, and why I believed these terms described their experiences, the participants agreed that the way I framed their experiences in terms of dehumanization and resistance strategies was an accurate description of their experiences. One participant stated: “I can see myself doing each and every one of them at some point in time or another.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Elder interviews**

I interviewed two older Aboriginal women whom I refer to as Elders. The purpose of interviewing Elders was to get a different perspective on the research from older Aboriginal women who would have the benefit of greater experiential knowledge of the history of Aboriginal women in the Saskatoon community and of Aboriginal women’s historic resistance in urban communities. The first Elder, Marji Pratt-Turo was interviewed in her seniors’ apartment in downtown Saskatoon. I had known this Elder for several years prior to the interview. The second Elder, Leona Tootosis, was interviewed in her house on the east side of Saskatoon and this was the first time I had met her.

The Elders were recommended as potential participants by my thesis advisor, Dr. Winona Wheeler. These Elders had both lived in the City of Saskatoon for many years. Both women were, and continued to be, active in advocating for Aboriginal people in the city. I contacted the women by phone and explained my research and asked to interview them for my thesis. When I went to their homes I offered them tobacco as a culturally appropriate protocol when asking an

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<sup>18</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications, Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK., June 15, 2007.

Elder for help or advice. Although often this is reserved for spiritual matters, the information I was requesting was significant enough to warrant this form of reciprocity. The Elders accepted the tobacco and agreed to be interviewed. I explained the reason for the research and the processes I had gone through in the interviews and the focus groups. I also asked them for their help interpreting and understanding the data. I asked them if they thought I was on track and if there was anything amiss or inaccurate in my methods or analyses.

### **Transcription and Thematic Analysis**

After the first three interviews, I began transcribing the interviews *verbatim* in pencil into a notebook. I left spaces between sections of speech corresponding to silences, questions or the start of new thoughts in the interviews. The sections were as much to provide white space in my notebook as to visually separate ideas from one another. Beside each section of the participants' speech, I wrote several words to identify possible themes. These included anything of potential relevance such as the topic of the discussion, significant nouns in the speech, relationships, emotions, descriptors used by the participant, names of agencies and verbs. I used themes that were as specific as possible. I began to notice that some themes appeared repeatedly and many seemed interrelated. Themes interacted and overlapped; one section could have several themes attached. I combined similar themes into main themes and looked for connection between main themes. For example, the themes of food, clothing and shelter were combined into the main theme of basic needs. This was a process of intuition, and trial and error. If a theme did not seem appropriate, it was abandoned or modified. As I continued interviewing participants I found that some of the smaller and larger themes were repeated in many interviews. Those themes that were not repeated beyond two interviews were not usually carried through to the final analysis, unless it was an exceptional idea such as Claudia's use of Cree terms.

Many participants had little formal or public speaking experience. Unlike women with advanced educations, or those who grew up immersed in a culture of oral storytelling, most were not familiar with formal speaking. Their stories did not necessarily have a well-defined beginning middle and end. A story may begin at one point, be broken up with other material that came to mind and then have various points revisited and added to at a later time in the interview. Gluck describes the unconventional structure of women's narratives as follows:

Some women, particularly less educated working-class women, are not accustomed to reflecting about themselves, to viewing their lives as important. The stories they are used to repeating are those which recount a courageous act, a funny episode, or a tragic event in their families. Consequently, the interview might be a string of anecdotes with little connecting material or insufficient descriptions to place these anecdotes in a context adequately understandable to outsiders.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these critiques of less education women's speech, I found that the women in this study were quite articulate, their points were clear, and their stories were powerful and moving. The challenge was to translate the oral testimony into a written document in a manner that accurately reflected the richness of the interviews.

The potential risks of the study and the nature of participants made transcription methods problematic. Minimizing potential risks required significant editing to remove specific information that could identify the woman or a third party, including the agency. Although there are many Aboriginal women in Saskatoon, some stories are specific enough for a particular woman to be identifiable by those familiar with her situation. I have ensured that the themes and quotations are specific enough to give an accurate description of women's experiences, but general enough to protect their anonymity. Additionally, I removed identifying information such as names and other specifics which could possibly identify a participant. I replaced these with a

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<sup>19</sup> Gluck, "What's So Special About Women?," 227.

generic description so, for example, the name of specific man would become ‘my husband’.

Additional changes made to the initial *verbatim* quotes include removing repetitions, non-speech sounds such as ‘um’ or ‘er’, and interjections which are not part of the story. I also deleted conjunctions such as ‘and’ in extremely long sentences, separating them into two or more sentences.

Originally I tried to use conventional transcription techniques, but found I was left with a large number of square brackets and ellipses which made the quotations arduous to read. It was not an accurate representation of the way the women expressed themselves in the interviews. I believe that the participants wanted their stories presented and shared in a way that would be clear and understandable. They wanted people to read and understand their experiences. The *verbatim* method of transcription did not do justice to their contributions to the study.

I chose, to the best of my ability, to portray the participants’ stories to their full potential. I took each quote with its multiple deletions and insertions in square brackets, and deleted the square brackets and ellipses. The resulting text was no longer a quotation as understood by the academy because it had been edited to the point where it could no longer be considered the exact words of the participant. My additions and deletions had added my voice to the text as I determined what was to be excluded, added or left untouched. Yet, the remaining text cannot be considered a paraphrase since it was not my intention to restate the participants’ arguments in my own words. The final result is a hybrid text that is neither fully my voice nor fully the voice of the participant. Throughout the following chapters I present this hybrid text as conventional quotations.

## **Interpretation and Analysis**

Records obtained from the interviews require interpretation and analysis, much like any other sources. Decisions need to be made about what information to include and which to exclude. Oral historian William Moss states, “Analysis is the process by which form and order are brought to the chaos of evidence about the past, to bring meaning and understanding not only to the individual historian but to many people with differing subjective views of reality.”<sup>20</sup> The information must be presented in a way that ensures it will be understood by a wide audience including the Aboriginal women who participated and the academic community. Presenting the information from a marginal group, particularly one significantly different from the dominant culture, presents challenges for analysis and interpretation. The dominant culture and the subaltern cultures within it may have vastly different, even contradictory, interpretations based on their differing views of reality. Hegemony dictates that the interpretations of the dominant culture will appear most reasonable to that group. The mechanisms of hegemony ensure that the subaltern are aware of the ideology of the dominant culture while the dominant culture may not be aware of the realities of the subaltern culture within it. Yet the goal of the research is to bring the interpretations of the subaltern to the attention of the academy in a manner that is acceptable and understood. The challenge is to interpret the data in a manner that bridges the difference in understandings of the multivariate groups.

In this study, the researcher is a member of the subaltern group of urban Aboriginal women under examination. As a member, I have an inside understanding of the experiences shared by the group including access to the hidden transcripts. This leads to a greater level of insight into the realities of urban Aboriginal women than might otherwise be expected. I was



already familiar with the government agencies identified in the interviews and the issues raised by the women in the study. These inside understandings of their circumstances inform this study. It is anticipated that the audience, however, will be predominantly made up of members of the dominant culture.

According to oral historian Charles Joyner, “The nearer we are culturally to the group we are trying to interpret, the more difficult it is for us to explain to others; the nearer we are to our audience, the greater our difficulty in understanding the subject.”<sup>21</sup> The experiences of the researcher’s Aboriginal cultural group may differ from those of the dominant group as well as from the public transcripts. The challenge was to analyse and present the experiences of my own cultural group to another in an unbiased manner to the best of my ability.

Oral history records personal reminiscences and describes both the events and the meaning that these events had for a person. In addition to claiming that oral history is not about verifying objective truth about events, Portelli also asserts that the events themselves are secondary to the person’s interpretation of them. Portelli states: “The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*.”<sup>22</sup> As such oral history is subjective. Events hold only the meanings that a person ascribes to them, and that meaning will be constructed by the confluence of their personality and experiential reality.

Hoopes explains:

One great virtue of oral history is its focus on the individual and consequently on personality. Sometimes culture and society are discussed at such a high level of

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<sup>20</sup>William Moss, “Oral History: An Appreciation,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 107-120 (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1996), 112.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Joyner, “Oral History as a Communicative Event,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., eds. David. K Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 292-297 (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 1996), 294.

<sup>22</sup>Portelli, “What makes oral history different?,” 67.

abstraction that we forget that only through the behavior of individual personalities do the concepts of culture and society have meaning.<sup>23</sup>

In this research project, the meaning of the actual resistance act to the woman is just as important, if not more so, than the act itself. Like other forms of history, oral history is about interpretation.

According to Jan Vansina,

Interpretation is a choice between several possible hypotheses, and the good historian is the one who chooses the hypothesis that is most likely to be true. In practice it can never have more than a likelihood of truth, because the past has gone for good and all, and the possibility of firsthand observation of past events is forever excluded.<sup>24</sup>

Interpretation is the researcher's choice of possible meanings and explanations. For interpretation of oral history of minority classes, a researcher must use or develop a non-hegemonic form of data analysis. That is, the method of interpretation must fit the data. Oral historian Peter Friedlander explains:

To meaningfully describe patterns of behavior or to analyze the structure of an event are objectives that often lie beyond the reach of orthodox uses of data, particularly when one's interests shift from the various intellectual, social, and political elites to the industrial working class.<sup>25</sup>

In this case project, I used the concept of "dehumanization" as a framework for analysis and chose the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as the criteria for analysis because it seemed suitably clear, concise and objective.

### Summary

This chapter examined the theory behind and application of the primary methods used in this research project. The grounded theory approach called for use of a qualitative interview

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<sup>23</sup> Hoopes, *Oral History*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Vansina, "Oral Tradition and Historical Method," 124.

technique and thematic analysis of the data. The oral history interviews provided the raw data. Grounded theory and oral history interviews were chosen for this particular study with Aboriginal women in an urban setting because they were designed for research with minority populations. The project was then planned with these methods having the needs of this population in mind. The interviews and focus groups were set up as nonthreatening and open-ended as possible. Ethical concerns were addressed through anonymity and transcription practices.

Throughout this research, various interpretations of a specific event were possible. That is, the women's stories could be interpreted in several ways but the women had already endowed them with meaning. The stories were intended to relate the experience of resistance and this interpretation will provide the basis of the analysis.

The thematic analysis called for in grounded theory required the women's stories to be coded into conceptual categories. When a relation between conceptual categories was identified, the stories were grouped based on these insights. These conceptual categories became the themes used to organize the following chapters. Dehumanization quickly became a theme so an interpretive framework which defined dehumanization was used to analyze the data. Resistance was then defined as opposition to dehumanization.

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Friedlander, "Theory, method and oral history," in *The Oral History Reader* eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 311-319 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 317.

## CHAPTER 4 DEHUMANIZATION

This goal of this chapter is to establish what the women in the study were resisting. The participants told many personal stories of negative experiences with government agencies. After several interviews certain patterns began to establish themselves. Women repeatedly discussed specific unmet physical needs of themselves and their children and described their attempts to meet these needs. They described in detail their conflictual interactions with the government workers they encountered. They described family members being separated from one another when they were placed in foster care as children or had their own children removed. Some were compelled to separate from their spouses in order to keep their children. In my analyses these experiences can be understood as acts of dehumanization. The criteria I use to determine that these acts are dehumanization are found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.<sup>1</sup> The women were not told about the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Rights* during the interview because the framework was chosen during the analysis stage of the project. At the time of the interviews, I had no specific framework in mind. They were, however, informed of their human rights in the community feedback process discussed in Chapter 5 and they responded positively to its use as an analytical framework to describe their experiences.

Canada has been a member of the United Nations since November 9, 1945.<sup>2</sup> On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (UN), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.  
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> (accessed on May 5, 2007)

<sup>2</sup> Canada is also a signatory of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. Josephine Savarese and Bonnie Morton, *Women and Social Assistance in Saskatchewan and Manitoba* (Regina: The Prairie Women's Centre for Excellence, 2005), 30.

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* [See Appendix E -- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*]. As a signatory nation, Canada agreed to uphold the principles of the declaration including protecting these rights by rule of law and promoting a universal respect and observance of them.<sup>3</sup> Applicable articles from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* are presented in this study as a framework for assessing the minimum standard of treatment these Aboriginal women should expect to receive from social services and other government agencies. The following analysis demonstrates that, according to the perspectives and experiences shared by the women interviewed in this study, they experienced dehumanizing treatment from government agencies which can be considered breeches of their basic rights and fundamental freedoms.

### **Dehumanization**

The three most significant human rights standards applied to the following analysis of the women's experiences are: (1) basic human rights such as food, clothing, housing and medical care; (2) protection from harassment, abuse and racial prejudice from persons within the system which interferes with the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for personal dignity and the free development of personality; and (3) protection against interference with autonomy and self-determination, in particular, protection against government interference with their rights to privacy, family and home. The participants expressed a great loss of personal dignity through the experience of unsuitable treatment and used strong terms such as animal, dog, animal, monster, or wasted person in the descriptions of how they felt as a result of their experiences.

Yet, dehumanization is a means to an end; it serves the purpose of perpetuating an unequal social order. As discussed in Chapter 2, the true nature of neo-colonial government

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<sup>3</sup> UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

agencies is to acquire resources as colonial agencies had done in the past. In order to avoid true generosity which might interfere with resource acquisition, these agencies have to maintain the appearance of generosity without affecting a true change in the social structure which supports inequality. This is done by giving recipients slightly less than they require to meet their basic needs, and then pathologizing their lack of improvement. The perceived deviance of Aboriginal women becomes the basis for racial stereotypes, and opens the door for harassment and abuse. Government workers ensure the perpetuation of the present social structure by denying Aboriginal women the autonomy and self-determination necessary to make changes which would permanently end the social and economic inequality from which the dominant society benefits.

### **Human Right to Food, Clothing, Shelter and Medical care.**

According to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.<sup>4</sup>

A significant source of Aboriginal women's oppression arises from their reliance on social welfare agencies for access to those things that are considered basic necessities or basic human rights. Although the provincial Ministry of Social Services is responsible for providing social assistance, participants found that assistance is sometimes not available or the assistance that is available is inadequate or inappropriate.

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<sup>4</sup> UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Many women in the study reported the lack of food, clothing, shelter, bedding and furnishings.<sup>5</sup> Geraldine talked about her child being denied formula, because she cannot qualify for assistance. Although she has no money of her own, she lived with the child's father which made her ineligible for social assistance benefits. He spent his money on alcohol. She had previously attempted to leave this man but could not find affordable housing. According to Geraldine, assistance for food was denied:

They cut me off welfare. I asked for \$30 for baby milk but they refused. The worker said she would ask her supervisor but then called me back to say she couldn't help. I can't rely on the baby's dad even though I'm supposed to live with him. He drinks and owes me money. My cousin helps me out. I don't get any help from social services and I don't care because I don't want to be on welfare anyway.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to this Geraldine was refused benefits to buy clothes for the child she was expecting:

I used to be on the TEA program and they would ask all kinds of questions like do I have any disease and do I need anything. I said I need money for baby clothes. They said they can't help me and to call my worker. The welfare worker said they couldn't help and I had to wait for my welfare cheque at the end of the month. I had my baby before the end of the month. My mom had to find clothes for me so I could take my baby home from the hospital.<sup>7</sup>

Katie received assistance for furnishings which was inadequate for her needs after she moved to Saskatoon with only clothes and a few personal items: "I had been in Saskatoon for over a month. I started with nothing. I asked for furniture but they didn't get back to me. I got an advance of \$240 for everything: dishes, a bed, towels..."<sup>8</sup> Katie lived in inadequate and dangerous housing situation because the shelter allowance amount was not enough to pay market

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<sup>5</sup> Mildred Kerr, Debbie Frost and Diane Bignell, *Don't We Count as People?: Saskatchewan Social Welfare Policy And Women's Health* (Regina: The Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, 2004) also found similar results.

<sup>6</sup> "Geraldine," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December 2006.

<sup>7</sup> "Geraldine," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December 2006.

<sup>8</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

rates of rent for adequate housing and low income housing was not available. Katie described her living conditions as follows:

I am down in the strip called the Gutter Strip. Landlords couldn't give a rat's ass about anything. There are holes in the walls and it needs painting. They're making money. I had to take this place because it was affordable, even the way it looks. The place is \$365.<sup>9</sup> I have a bad landlord. I'm not paying the extra forty dollars from my pocket because things are not fixed. The buzzer doesn't work and the hallway lights don't work. It is scary at night. There are drug dealers next door, party people down the hall and needle users on the other side.<sup>10</sup>

Bernadette, who was a community advocate, discussed a number of situations where she advocated for women who could not afford shelter. One woman was paying far more than her \$500 monthly shelter allowance for a rundown house. According to Bernadette:

It takes money for rent. The landlords want more rent. One lady has to pay \$725 for her house. The landlord raised the rent by \$75. The landlord just wanted to get rid of her so he would not have to fix the house. He only got \$700 from the next tenant.<sup>11</sup>

Esther also had difficulty with housing. She wanted to complain about her poor housing and the long wait for social housing but was not sure who she could ask for help or even if she would be believed. She told me:

I don't know who to talk to. If I say something they might believe the white people more than Natives. I want to complain about trying to rent a house. I am still waiting for a house through Sask Housing. I have been waiting two years.

Isabel described the difficulty she had with two non-profit housing corporations, Saskatoon Housing and Saskatoon Native Housing. While on a housing waitlist, she lived in a market priced rental apartment. She was worried about the living conditions of low income rentals. According to Isabel:

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<sup>9</sup> She gets \$320 shelter allowance.

<sup>10</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006.



I applied to Sask Housing but couldn't get in. Sask housing has apartments on Ave P but there are crazy people around there. I feel safer in my apartment even if rent is cheaper. I think I'm off the file because I forgot to fill out the form. Sask Housing houses don't look great. Some near here are nice but they are not available. Sask Indian housing takes a long time to fix things like fixtures and fences.

Several participants talked about children being left without shelter after being summarily evicted from the family home by child protection officials or police if they felt the home was unsafe for the children. The cold weather caused concern for them when their children were denied access to the family home. In winter, Saskatoon temperature can fall below -30 with windchill. Della questioned the appropriateness of this form of 'protection' that denied shelter to children in cold weather. She stated:

They won't give my younger children back while my oldest daughter is living at home but I'm not going to lock my daughter out when she's drunk and let her freeze. Last time social services came, they gave my other daughter five minutes to leave with my grandchild. They lived with me because they could not get a welfare appointment. Social services made my daughter take the baby out into the snow with no place to go. They told my daughter she can't come to the house with my grandson or they'll take him.<sup>12</sup>

Participants reported that even medical care, often taken for granted in Canada, is often inadequate or delayed. Della was refused medical care while in premature labour after her water broke. She went to the nearest clinic but was refused medical care. According to Della:

I was pregnant and went into early labour when my water broke. I walked to the clinic and said I was in labour. The receptionist said they couldn't help me because I wasn't a client. They sent me away. I almost cried because I was in pain and had to walk home. The receptionist didn't try to stop me or call anyone for me. She didn't care what happened to me. I saw my sister and she went and phoned an ambulance for me. I ended up having the baby right after I got to the hospital. I'm not a medical person but I would never do that to someone. I would call someone. It still bothers me after years.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Della," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

<sup>13</sup> "Della," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

At the time I spoke to her, several years after the incident, she still expressed her horror that she or her child could have died on the street outside the clinic and no one would have cared.

Joanne reported that her daughter received inadequate medical care and was not protected from an infectious disease while in foster care. She claims that social services delayed medical care for the child until she was in a critical condition. According to Joanne:

My daughter got scars from being in foster care. The foster parent was supposed to notify the case worker if a child is sick so they can remove the unsick children. The foster parent had a child with chicken pox. My baby got chicken pox that got infected and was in the hospital for a month. I was on a trip home when I got the call that my baby was in ICU. When the scabs dropped off it was pearly white. The back of her neck was like she got slashed. The supervisor admitted they were at fault. She is almost five now and scarred for life.<sup>14</sup>

Esther received medical care which was inappropriate for her because it was provided in a demeaning manner. According to Esther:

When I went to the hospital to have my baby, I had scabies but forgot to tell them. When they found out they put me in a cage - like a dog. They wouldn't touch me or go near me. I felt embarrassed and humiliated but I couldn't do anything so I just sat there.<sup>15</sup>

Medications, whether prescribed or not, are difficult to obtain. According to Bernadette: "I could not afford even \$2 for a prescription. I need over the counter medicine but can't afford it on \$170."

Participants reported that they were not appropriately treated during pregnancy from social services even in their ninth month. Many participants stated that social assistance would not pay for any preparations such as diapers, clothes or bedding for the child's birth. If additional benefits are provided, it is as an advance which must be paid from future benefits. Poverty rights

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<sup>14</sup> "Joanne," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 13 December 2006.

<sup>15</sup> "Esther," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 December 2006.

activists Mildred Kerr, Debbie Frost and Diane Bignell provide a critique of the advance policy which they call: “one of the cruelest policies in the system.”<sup>16</sup> As a result of this policy, several participants were unprepared at the time of their child’s birth. Isabel told me:

I tried to get on social services when I was pregnant. They told me to get a job but I was sick all the time and didn’t want to puke at work. I had stomach problems before but they got worse when I was pregnant. I got a job but couldn’t keep it because I was sick. I only got on a month before the baby was due. I had a hard time getting stuff for the baby. They didn’t help with baby stuff and told me that if they gave me money I would have to pay it back out of my cheques. I didn’t take the advance because living from month to month on social services was already hard because there was not enough for the basics.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the participants claimed that they were required to look for work right up until the birth of their child and were refused benefits if they did not seek employment.<sup>18</sup> Bernadette claims that women who are unwilling or unable to look for work are simply refused social assistance benefits:

One nine month pregnant woman I worked with had to do a job search or no cheque. They were holding her cheque so she had no money. She walked to the University Hospital with pains every two or three minutes. I wanted to call the Star Phoenix but the woman was afraid of being ridiculed because she was a poor Indian.<sup>19</sup>

Social services, when they are provided, are often perceived by participants as inappropriate for their needs or are delayed. Arladene provided an example of this from her childhood when her mother was attempting to flee an abusive situation. Arladene’s mother found herself turned away from a women’s shelter and then arrested when she attempted to get help from social services. Arladene recalls:

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<sup>16</sup> Kerr et al., *Don’t We Count as People?*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> “Isabel.” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK., 11 December 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Similar finding regarding pregnant women were provided by Kerr et al. 21.

<sup>19</sup> “Bernadette,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK., 21 November 2006.

My step-father was beating up my mom and I jumped on his back to try and stop him. That's the last thing I remember. When I woke up my step-father was sleeping and my mom was unconscious on the bathroom floor. I thought she was dead. Eventually my mom woke up, washed her face and grabbed me in my pyjamas and we went to a women's shelter but we were turned away with nothing. My mother took me back to the house to try and sneak to get some belongings. We went to social services. The social worker took me into another room and then sent for police to arrest my mom. I was put in foster care and, eventually, adopted to a non-Aboriginal family.<sup>20</sup>

Participants also reported that assistance was withheld for a wide variety of reasons. Joanne's cheque was withheld because her worker wanted her to apply for child support, even though this was not possible. According to Joanne:

Welfare wanted me to get child support from the babies' dad but because he receives educational funding I can't collect. I went to legal aid and they can't do anything. The worker was pushing it and put my benefits on hold. I told legal aid and they said to request a new worker. I tried to call my welfare worker's supervisor three times but she didn't return my call.<sup>21</sup>

Isabel had her benefits withheld twice, once for no apparent reason and once because of administrative errors. Isabel explained:

I was on social services waiting for a cheque and didn't get it. I phoned them and it took a while to get through. They had no reason as to why it was withheld. Another time they held it because the worker was supposed to call me but didn't. I had to have the worker call them and tell them to release the benefits. I got it on the seventh of the month; my rent was seven days late.<sup>22</sup>

The withholding and withdrawal of benefits, particularly when it appears arbitrary or inappropriate to the participants, caused considerable stress among the Aboriginal women in the study especially for those who had children in their care.

Clearly, the participants in this study believed that their basic human rights to food, clothing, housing and medical care were not being met. They did not receive special assistance

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<sup>20</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>21</sup> "Joanne," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 13 December 2006.

<sup>22</sup> "Isabel," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 11 December 2006.

during motherhood or childhood. The agency they discussed the most was social assistance, the agency primarily responsible for providing financial assistance to those in need. Assistance from this agency was clearly inadequate, delayed or even refused to some. Housing and health services were also mentioned as being inadequate and delayed. The participants' standard of living was inadequate to provide for their health and well being as defined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

The provision of social services which are inadequate to meet the needs of recipients is a prime example of the false generosity of the oppressor. The rationalization for the inadequacy of social services is based on the perception that poverty is a personal defect caused by unemployment instead of a structural problem caused by unequal access to resources. Therefore, the poor may be stereotyped as deviant and become the recipients of false generosity through social services that do not alleviate the plight of recipients by raising their social or economic status to that of the oppressor. Rather, poor social services ensure that the recipients will continually have unmet needs thereby guaranteeing that the status quo prevails and ensuring that the oppressor has continuing opportunities to express false generosity.

### **Abuse, Harassment and Racial Prejudice**

According to Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, according to Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or

attacks.”<sup>24</sup> Despite these protections, the participants reported that they and/or their families experienced incidences of abuse, harassment or discrimination from persons within government agencies. Abuse, harassment and discrimination are dehumanizing acts that occur when powerful people dominate relations with less powerful individuals in a negative manner. The Aboriginal women who participated in this study regularly experienced these forms of dehumanization in their involvement with government services.

Katie described her abuse as a child in foster care:

I was abused in foster care by three foster brothers. Me and my sister were wards of the government. There was a monthly cheque but no follow up. Somebody showed up the day my foster mother died and put us in another foster home.<sup>25</sup>

Some participants also reported that no protection or assistance was provided when a member of their family reported abuse. Allegations of sexual abuse and harassment were common themes arising in the majority of interviews. According to Katie: “I found out my grandson was being molested by school staff. I went to the school but they wouldn’t take my word for it. I went to the police but they wouldn’t do anything.”<sup>26</sup> Many participants stated that complaints of abuse were not be taken seriously, that they reported incidents of abuse to authorities who did not believe them and that nothing occurred to stop the abuse.

Bernadette, shared a story about how she believed that a social worker had sold her child for personal profit and fled the country to avoid prosecution. She gave birth to a son 30 years prior to the interview. He was taken at birth and although she tried to use the court system to get him back she was unable to. According to Bernadette:

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<sup>23</sup> UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

<sup>24</sup> UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

<sup>25</sup> “Katie,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>26</sup> “Katie,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

I want to find out where my third oldest son is living. Welfare took him at birth and I didn't even get to see him. They said that I was an alcoholic and that he was deformed. I wasn't an alcoholic at that time. I think the social worker sold him. I fought for years through the courts. My lawyer found out from the nurses that he was not deformed, just considered available to be given away. I tried to take the social worker to court but he had disappeared from the country.<sup>27</sup>

Participants found that they had to endure abuse, mild and severe, without remedy.

Two of the women interviewed worked in government agencies, which in a sense means that they are also depend on government agencies for their livelihoods, although somewhat less so than those who receive services as clients. Both women reported being harassed on federal job sites. Helen reported racial harassment on the jobsite:

After the Affirmative Action<sup>28</sup> policy came in I applied for a government position. A less qualified non-Aboriginal woman also applied. I had the education and experience but the letter came that I had been accepted under the Affirmative Action policy. Once I got the job, I never had an orientation into my position and they never showed me anything. They wanted to ensure I failed because they liked the non-Aboriginal woman and had wanted her to get the position.<sup>29</sup>

Katie reported sexual harassment by the supervisor at her jobsite. Although she complained to the union, no grievance was filed:

I was sexually harassed at my job. The shop steward manipulated the situation to benefit that guy. I needed someone to be there and to make a stand for me. The steward didn't do that.<sup>30</sup>

Harassment sometimes takes the form of attitudinal harassment in the form of derision of clients and an apparently intentional affront that diminishes self-esteem.<sup>31</sup> The participants

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<sup>27</sup> "Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006

<sup>28</sup> Canadian federal government departments adopted an employment equity policy shortly after a 1984 Royal Commission Report recommending it was released. Rosalie Silberman Abella, *Equality in Employment*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, October, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>30</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Kerr et al, *Don't We Count as People?*, 27 gives additional example of this.

reported instances of disrespectful and mean treatment, such that they felt like the workers looked upon them with disdain. Joanne's story is a case in point:

I am the mother of twelve children. I had trouble with welfare at the year-end interview. I submitted what I needed to and I was pregnant. The worker wanted to know my goals and strengths. My goal is to finish school and to look after my daycare needs. The worker said: "By the time your kids are finished school you'll be a hundred years old. You can't even feed your own children." I didn't understand what the social worker wanted me to say.<sup>32</sup>

Esther claimed that prison workers made rude remarks and voiced negative opinions of the prisoners. She recalled a time when workers openly mocked women who were accessing drug treatment: "In Pine Grove, I had to line up for methadone. The clinic workers were laughing at us and calling us a name. It's not right for them to do that."<sup>33</sup>

Although some claimed to have reported abuse to police, others claimed it was the police who were the abusers. According to Geraldine:

We were at a powwow and this one cop tried to pick up my little sister. He tried to get her to go into the tent with him. We called security, but security didn't believe us. They said we were just lying to get him in trouble. An old lady even heard him do that.<sup>34</sup>

Many participants believed that police resorted to unreasonable force and acted arbitrarily in some instances. Many participants noted they had experienced abuse or harassment from police officers and that police act in a high handed manner without regard for their rights or due process. Della claims that the police regularly perform illegal searches of her home. According to Della: "The cops come and search my house looking for my son and threatened to charge me for

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<sup>32</sup> "Joanne," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 13 December 2006.

<sup>33</sup> "Esther," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 December 2006.

<sup>34</sup> "Geraldine," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December 2006.



harbouring. They wouldn't show me a warrant. When they finished their search I told them to get out. They began mocking me."<sup>35</sup> Many women expressed fear of the police.

Several women told stories that suggest that in some cases police officers have stereotypical perspectives of Aboriginal people that influence their actions which are often inappropriate and humiliating. Arladene told a story of being arrested for being drunk when she had little to drink. According to Arladene: "They chased me into the bar, threw me on the ground, stuck a knee in me back and handcuffed me. It was embarrassing. They said I was drunk in a public place but refused to breathalyse me."<sup>36</sup> Geraldine told a story that indicates that being pregnant does not protect women from accusations of alcohol or drug abuse, or from being placed in jail because of these allegations:

When I was eight months pregnant, I was out with my friend who got so drunk that she spilled a cooler on me. The cops said I was intoxicated and took me to Kilburn Hall. When they let me out the next morning they asked how I felt. I said: "I still feel that same, you dumbasses. I don't drink. You guys just act hateful and throw anyone in jail." I didn't drink; I didn't want my baby to have FAS.<sup>37</sup>

Police are not the only ones that seem to stereotype Aboriginal women as alcohol and drug abusers. This appears to be a wide spread racial stereotyping that affected almost all participants in the study. According to Bernadette: "I applied for Aboriginal social housing. The housing corporation said I am an alcoholic and a drug addict. They don't even know me. I've been sober for 21 years. I even quit smoking."<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, it was difficult for participants to convince government workers that they were not abusing substances.

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<sup>35</sup> "Della," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

<sup>36</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>37</sup> "Geraldine," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December 2006.

<sup>38</sup> "Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006

The women in this study reported a number of instances of abuse, harassment and racial discrimination by persons working within government agencies. Those who reported it were rarely believed or protected from further incidents. They did not receive the protection of the law from interference with their privacy, family, home or to attacks upon their honour and reputation. These are clearly breeches of the criteria outlined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Racial discrimination stems from stereotypes of the oppressed race as deviant. According to Paulo Freire, stereotypes stem from colonialism which imposes images of deviance onto the colonized in order to justify colonization.<sup>39</sup> Neo-colonial government structures still carry the legacy of colonial stereotypes despite the public assertion that all people are equal under the law. Discrimination, abuse and harassment can most easily occur in situations where there is an imbalance of power, as in this study where the participants were disadvantaged on the basis of race, class and gender.

Although the incidents ranged across all agencies, many centred on the use of force and intimidation by the police. The police are one the neo-colonial institutions responsible for maintaining social control by upholding laws created by and for the dominant sector of society. Since neo-colonial systems maintain inequality, it is not surprising that the Aboriginal women in this study would report that the police acted in a manner which perpetuated their oppression rather than alleviated it.

### **Interference with Autonomy and Self-determination**

Two sections of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* speak to aspects of personal autonomy and self-determination. According to Article 22 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, according to Article 16 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

- (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.<sup>41</sup>

Despite these assurances, participants reported massive interference with their families from government agencies including income assistance, child protection and police. Of particular concern were the reports of husbands alienated from the family, as well as the prevalence of child apprehensions. Other participants reported violations against their personal autonomy and self-determination which reflects the participants' lack of political power and their marginalized status within the dominant society.

Many Aboriginal women experienced alienation and disruption from their families because of government agency actions. Many participants experienced government induced familial ruptures between siblings, couples or parents and children, which usually occurred with some form of coercion and often through physical force. According to the participants of this study, involuntary separation of family members is justified by government workers as being in the best interest of one or all of the parties, yet always occurs without their consent.

Della claimed that she was separated from her common-law husband and child against her will. As the result of a domestic dispute and over their objections, both she and her husband

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<sup>39</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 74.

<sup>40</sup> UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

were given court orders which allowed no contact with each other except for access to their child. On one occasion when he came to visit his child, as allowed by the order, the police and child protection came and removed both her husband and child from her home. According to Della:

My partner was at my house to see the baby. The restraining order allows my spouse contact that involves the child. Crisis worker arrived to apprehend the baby and put my spouse in jail. They wouldn't look at the paper that allows contact with the child.<sup>42</sup>

One participant experienced multiple separations over time. First, she and her sister were taken from her parents, and later she was separated from her sister. According to Arladene:

I came to my adoptive home from school to find my stuff packed in boxes. The social worker was there to pick me up. My sister was holding on to me screaming. I was never allowed to talk to my sister again.<sup>43</sup>

Later, Arladene was separated from her partner and children under similar circumstances. Her marriage was disallowed by child protection workers, and her spouse was excluded from her family without her consent and without a court order. According to Arladene:

When my partner was in jail for breaching parole, I contacted his parole officer requesting the parole officer relay pictures of our children to my partner. The parole officer contacted social services about this as a child protection issue. When he was released from jail, social services attended the house and forbid my children to have contact with my partner even though there was no order from the courts. They would come and search my house looking for him. They eventually obtained a supervision order until a court date. One day he came to my door but did not enter the house or have contact with the children. Social services showed up and removed the children. They must have been watching the house.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

<sup>42</sup> "Della," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

<sup>43</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>44</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

Although government officials may perceive involuntary separation of family members as being in the best interests of the children, the women in this study disagreed. Participants often disputed the social workers perception of events. According to Joanne:

My daughter went to my sister and said I had hit her. My sister called child protection and they apprehended the kids. I told them I didn't do anything. I had to sit there while the cops took my kids. They told me they would put my daughter in a safe place...I asked where my daughter was because it was my right to know. They told me, "on the street." They call that a safe place.<sup>45</sup>

The participants dwelled heavily on the separation and alienation of family members which seemed to be one of the most painful consequences of contact with government agencies. They also reported milder interference with autonomy including being required to take part in programs they felt were useless and being required to look for work when they were unable to accept employment.

Many participants perceived their involvement with government agencies as a destructive and coercive force in their lives. Since policy creation and implementation is based on the agency's judgments regarding the needs of the participants, it often constituted false generosity. It may meet the needs of few, or none, of the intended beneficiaries and perpetuated the inequalities already inherent in the neo-colonial government agencies. Participants believed that this lack of primary control over their lives was a crippling and dehumanizing force, particularly where there may be a tendency for workers to see clients as just another case on a large case load.

Arladene refused to follow policy that she claimed would not benefit her children. She felt that the child protection services became increasingly coercive to the point of threatening to apprehend her children. Arladene explained:

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<sup>45</sup> "Joanne," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 13 December 2006.

Social services wanted to control me through my child. I will stand up against them. There are no free thinkers there. They are bound by mandates. They tried so hard to get their hands on my kids because I wouldn't comply. They want to control my home and make me ineffectual. They resort to extortion with my children. They have more power than cops do - too much power. They want women to comply. Women who are compliant have an easy time. Non-compliance is punished.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, Claudia had difficulty obtaining educational funding for a program which would fulfill her person educational goals but not those of her First Nation. Claudia stated: "What about individuals? It kills our spirit. It's disheartening. It kills our drive. They want students to come home and run programs. They set our goals for us."<sup>47</sup>

Some participants found that their perceptions of themselves were invalidated. While a child in foster care, Arladene claimed that her individual needs were dismissed by the workers making decisions about her. According to Arladene:

Social services believed I was wrong to be pissed off. They were not asking me...they were talking about and around me, not to me. They were not asking about my needs. They were not treating me like a human being. They were not interested in my love of music, books or track and field or what made me me.<sup>48</sup>

Helen experienced a violation of her identity as an Aboriginal person. The government has the power to determine a woman's legal status (as Indian or not) despite what she may think. Helen was recognized as an Indian under the *Indian Act* eighteen years after applying to the government for her Indian status. Helen told me:

I always knew I was an Indian but it always bothered me that the government could say I wasn't an Indian. I applied for my status card in 1985 and got it in 1998. It was an emotional day when the government recognized me as an Indian. As the day went by, happy turned to angry. What right did they have to tell me I was not an Indian all these years?<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>47</sup> "Claudia," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006.

<sup>48</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>49</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

The women in this study were denied the social rights which allowed dignity and the freedom to develop their personality. Many felt themselves coerced, stereotyped and had their identities denied. Furthermore, they found that government did not uphold the right to marriage and family when dealing with them as clients. Agencies attempted to dissolve families by separating couples and removing children from their parents against their will. Their families were viewed as unnatural and potentially dangerous and not given the protection by the state they are entitled to under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

The denial of self-determination constitutes false generosity toward the Aboriginal women in this study by government agencies. Instead of giving the participants the resources they needed to elevate their social and economic positions, the government agencies made decisions for the participants based on perceptions of Aboriginal women as deviant. The decisions made by the workers did nothing to alleviate the inequalities of resources and socio-economic positions experienced by the women. Instead these decisions, which many women stated were not in the best interests of themselves and their children, perpetuated social problems. Denial of self-determination ensures that Aboriginal women cannot choose courses that would, possibly, be contrary to the interest of the oppressor. In particular, government decisions to separate families ensure that inequalities are carried into the next generation.

### **Summary**

The participants of this study give many poignant examples of Canada's failure to live up to its human rights obligations and its role in the consequent dehumanization of Aboriginal women in Canada. Participants reported that they do not experience a standard of living adequate to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and medical care. They reported incidents of abuse, harassment and discrimination when accessing services. Women reported a loss of

autonomy and self-determination. They stated that separation from family members was the most painful aspect of contact with agencies. These denials of basic human rights, as they are understood through the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, are the definition of dehumanization used in the study. Reaction to the loss of human rights is the basis of resistance discussed in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER 5 RESISTANCE

In order to consider the everyday resistance of Aboriginal women, this study examines Aboriginal women's responses to their dehumanizing experiences with government agencies. According to James C. Scott and Paulo Freire, where there is oppression there is also resistance.<sup>1</sup> If oppression is dehumanization, then resistance is the assertion of humanity. Freire explains that the main vocation of humankind is to become more fully human, therefore, people will naturally resist attempts to make them less so.<sup>2</sup> Using Scott's definition of resistance, neither the motive nor consequences define resistance but the forms of everyday resistance have certain features in common: "They require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understanding and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority."<sup>3</sup> Scott's analysis, for the most part, holds true here. The difference is that Aboriginal women's resistance does not necessarily avoid direct, symbolic confrontation. This difference is attributable to the relative freedom experienced by Aboriginal women in liberal democracy where oppression is not as complete as it is for those in Scott's study. The following analysis of women's stories incorporates Scott's claims of public and private discourses, or transcripts, which support or deny the legitimacy of the dominant culture. However in this study, the private transcripts need not be as well hidden as they were in Scott's study since the oppression and potential repercussions are not as great here as it was in his study group. In the societies Scott studied, the peasant and slaves had few rights.

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), 109 and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale, 1985), xvi.

A landlord or slaveholder could injure or kill his peasants and slaves with relative impunity. Their survival dictated that their resistance to such a powerful person would need to be well-hidden to avoid retribution.

With this in mind, I have identified three strategies that Aboriginal women participants used to counter dehumanization attempts which I have categorized as direct, indirect and hidden resistance. They are all active forms of resistance because they are manifest acts and are not to be confused with passive resistance which is the feigned absence of resistance. Rather, they are positions along a continuum of active resistance and, therefore, are not mutually exclusive. Participants may use only one strategy or a combination of all three to deal with a situation. Direct resistance may be the most readily identifiable form of resistance since it is ‘in your face’ resistance. Direct resistance is when the participant deals with the situation through the word or deed. Indirect resistance takes place when the participant resists with the assistance of a third party such as an advocate. Hidden resistance takes place when the participant resists without directly or indirectly confronting the situation.

The three identified resistance strategies these women used are further broken down into short and long-term goals. Strategies with short-term goals are immediate responses to dehumanization which typically were reactionary. They were an immediate response to dehumanization but are not necessarily repeated and usually did not usually result in long-term change. Examples include yelling at workers or running out of an office. Strategies with long-term goals are used by participants to address the situation of dehumanization with a future goal in mind or a strategy that is used repeatedly. Examples of long-term strategies include taking part in marches, joining a coalition or making a deliberate change in how they approach an agency when seeking assistance.

Women in this study experienced a reciprocal interrelationship of personal growth and community empowerment. They found their ability to resist was the result of personal growth from life experiences and personal healing. They also found that resisting strengthened them by building character. In this sense, oppression forces them to be strong and they use this strength to help strengthen others. Their personal empowerment was used to empower the community.

The women had their own analyses of their interactions with government agencies which also appear in the interviews. They emphasized a loss of self-determination, the importance of community and the power of Aboriginal women.

## **Resistance**

### **Emergence of the Private Transcript**

The Aboriginal women in this study reside within a liberal democracy in a neo-colonial state and are disadvantaged by a low social and socio-economic status within the dominant culture. They deal with a number of government agencies set up by the state intended to help them. In these interactions between the women and the state there are spoken and hidden discourses which play out publicly and privately. Scott explains that there is a public or official transcript which fulfills the needs of the dominant class and legitimizes the legal, political and economic order set in place to benefit them. In Canada, the public transcript asserts that all people are treated equally under the law, that all have an equal opportunity to succeed, and that people in need are helped by the agencies designed to provide services to them. These agencies represent a social safety net which allows all citizens to receive needed services. The public transcript is contained in the mandates of the programs and policies of the ministries and departments which administer them.

Scott asserts that oppressor and the oppressed each have private transcripts which are shared among these groups independently. This study does not address the private transcripts of the agencies or the workers within the agencies since this study focuses these interactions from the perspective of the research participants. The private transcripts shared among the women participants is that they are in fact not being adequately helped by services. They state that the services are not provided, inappropriately provided, or inadequately provided. They also state that they are being abused and that they are being alienated from their families.

The women in this study told me stories that fall into the three forms of everyday resistance. The first was overt breaches in the private transcript, a classic case of Scott's findings that the hidden transcript becomes most visible in times of great stress. The participants indicated that they were able to endure only a certain amount of dehumanization and then, at some point, they experienced an overwhelming desire to speak out regardless of the consequence. The participant has forsaken the public transcript and the private transcript emerges. She directly resists the public transcript by denouncing it and claiming rights often reserved for expression only in the private transcript. It is also the most conflict ridden form since participants show open defiance directly to a worker.

Since the women were more free to speak and act than the peasant's in Scott's study, the triggers were less severe and the reaction more forceful than he describes. Often, there is little a participant can do except to protest verbally since they are in a less powerful position and cannot affect a change without the cooperation of the more powerful party. Yet in this study, it is the most often implemented strategy and participants often expressed satisfaction at having articulated their frustration and discontent.

Indirect resistance challenges the public transcript only slightly and without open defiance. A more powerful third party is invited to take up a cause. This form of resistance mitigates dehumanization but does so by working within the system. Indirect resistance often decreases conflict between the participant and the worker. It also decreases the conflict between the public and private transcript because the public transcript is not directly breached by the participant. With indirect resistance a third-party mediates the partial emergence of the private transcript.

The hidden resistance described by the women in this study is similar to the hidden everyday forms of resistance described by Scott.<sup>4</sup> With hidden resistance the public transcript is not challenged. It remains intact as women find another way to deal with the dehumanization without directly challenging it. The hidden resistance arises out of the private transcript but it never becomes public. It takes place under cover, beyond the view of agency workers, and is the strategy that avoids direct or indirect conflict between the worker and the participant because there is no challenge to the public transcript. Scott explains that the dominant class can most easily tolerate a breach in application more than a challenge to the underlying ideology of the public transcript.<sup>5</sup>

The study was not long or substantial enough to discover the breadth of the hidden resistance. While Scott spent several years engaged in participant observation, during which he built a rapport with the peasant community, I was a relative stranger to most of the women in this study and overall only spent the equivalent of one day with each of them. Although I shared my background I did not have opportunity to build the rapport necessary to give them the confidence

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<sup>4</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 205.

they needed to share their hidden resistance strategies. Thus, most hidden resistance remained hidden.

### **Direct Resistance**

Direct resistance occurs when the participant deals with the situation through word or deed. Although direct confrontation may seem counterproductive at first glance, it is a strong form of resistance from the perspective of these women. It is a direct statement to government officials that they do not accept what is being done, even though they are powerless to stop it. Direct resistance creates a challenge for the government workers because it disrupts the orderly flow of work and makes business difficult for a particular worker. Scott considers these small acts of resistance in terms of their cumulative effect.

Three participants spoke about and described open defiance in reaction to humiliation. Helen spoke of this once in a general manner then later, in a specific context. Helen explains: “I have had a tough life. I will accept oppression to a point and then stand up.”<sup>6</sup> For two and a half years she worked in a government agency with a supervisor who harassed her. One day she got to the point where she could not take it anymore and spoke out. According to Helen: “My boss talked down to me in front of another employee. I just snapped. I had it. I talked right back to him...just yelled at him. I knew it was over, that this is it.”<sup>7</sup> Freda also shared a story about the difficulty she had with a particular social worker and how she dealt with it:

My social worker gave me a hard time until I started talking back. Usually I just let her say what she wants. This time she made me mad; she embarrassed me in front of people. She yelled at me in front of people so I yelled right back. Everyone in the waiting room went quiet.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Helen,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>7</sup> “Helen,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “Freda,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 7 December 2006.

Another participant reacted as a result of social assistance policies which demanded much but returned little. According to Katie:

It is humiliating to go to social services. It takes a toll on me emotionally. They make you run around, do this and that, and run around here and there. You get to the point where you have to take a stand. When you're hungry and sleeping on the floor, after a while it gets to be too much. So if I'm angry, I'll go to social services angry enough that I could take a knife and let them know that I mean business. I say, "It's my word and if you're not going to accept it I'll have to show you that I mean it!"<sup>9</sup>

Participants spoke of direct protest as an act of anger caused by unacceptable circumstances. In one case, Arladene felt that she was being physically threatened:

This cop put me in a car and stops under an underpass and tried to intimidate me. I was going to be defiant to the end. I bated the cop and told her to go ahead and do her worst. I was mad, not scared. The cop just looked surprised and then drove away. They put me in the drunk tank and let me go the next morning without charges.<sup>10</sup>

Bernadette recalled several instances where she directly confronted workers. On one occasion, her social assistance worker began to deduct an alleged overpayment from her monthly social assistance cheque. Bernadette recollected: "I said: 'Overpayment for what? It's a bunch of bullsh\*t. I will get my file audited. It's my file. You are working for me. You're treating me like a wasted person...like I don't deserve to have any extra money'."<sup>11</sup> Another time she had to wait several months for benefits for her grandson: "They were trying to give me a hard time with the Child Tax Benefit. He had the documents but it took me three months to get it. I told him, 'You guys are idiots.'"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>10</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>11</sup> "Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006.

<sup>12</sup> "Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006.

Several participants asserted their humanity by comparing themselves with government workers. Comparisons argue for a fundamental equality and are statements that reject inferiority, and may even assert superiority. This is evident in Joanne's story:

My daughter was two or three and had dried blood on her nose from the dry heat. The cops and social services went there asking my nephew questions. I had to go to the hospital with my daughter...The doctor said it was just from dry heat. When I got home they were escorting my children out. The cops said I had left my children with my sleeping nephew. Cops switch their story when it comes to social services. There wasn't much I could do. I told the supervisor, "You think Natives are all stupid, but we probably know more than you do."<sup>13</sup>

If the worker and the client are fundamentally equal, then the only difference is a variation in circumstance. That is, these women assert that they are just as human and entitled to the same respect as the government worker. According to Joanne:

She told me I couldn't keep my house clean. They had a case meeting. I told the social worker: "If you were in my shoes it would be different. If I had your job, you wouldn't be saying things like that to me. Because I don't meet your standards, you shouldn't be putting me down in front of other people. I don't have a good paying job and a nice home like you do. I have eight kids at home. You take care of my kids for one day and I'll be at your place." The social worker did not want to do that.<sup>14</sup>

Many participants expressed a belief that a government worker would do no better, may even worse, if placed in the same daily situations they face. This theme was frequently repeated throughout interviews and the participants felt a great deal of satisfaction at having expressed themselves this way since it negates the perception of the superiority of the worker. According to Della:

When my child was apprehended, my neighbour was shooting a gun. I told the social workers my surroundings were not my fault because I am on assistance and can't move. They said I have anger problems. I said: "Of course, **you** come live

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<sup>13</sup> "Joanne," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 13 December 2006.

<sup>14</sup> "Joanne," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 13 December 2006.



around here.” I have an education but choose to stay home to look after my baby and make sure my older children don’t join gangs.<sup>15</sup>

This is part of the private transcript which sometimes surfaces. This private transcript states or implies that the women participants were stronger, smarter, more resilient, more adaptable or in some other way superior to some government agency worker.

Bernadette more explicitly asserted her humanity when she believed that social services wanted her to deny her grandson access to his biological mother, which she found offensive. Bernadette stated: “I have custody of my grandson. Social services said that I cannot let him see his mom. I’m told them: ‘I’m not a monster. It’s her right’.”<sup>16</sup> She rejected her own dehumanization by refusing an act that would injure the child and his biological parent.

Two participants mentioned writing letters of complaint to officials within the agency. Helen had trouble with her boss at work. She took her complaint through the hierarchy of the department. She explained: “I have climbed right up to fight with a Minister. I had trouble with the Superintendent and went to the Deputy Minister and he laughed. That’s not right. I wrote a letter and went the Minister.”<sup>17</sup> Claudia tried to get assistance to address subtle racism occurring at her university. According to Claudia:

There was subtle racism. In one class the instructor was rude to me. She had an assigned seat and an assigned partner. The study partner was rude and turned her back to me. The other students snickered when I walked in. It affected my studies. I didn’t do well in that class all year. I went and talked to the counselor. I talked to the dean. I wrote everything down and gave it to them but nothing happened.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Della,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

<sup>16</sup> “Bernadette” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006.

<sup>17</sup> “Helen” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>18</sup> “Claudia” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006

Several participants engaged in physical acts of resistance. Geraldine was at home with her younger siblings when social services arrived on a child protection investigation. Social services had attended the house enough that Geraldine referred to them as ‘living’ there.

According to Geraldine:

Social services was living at my mom’s. Her common-law was not supposed to be there. Social services came there when he wasn’t there. They said he’s hiding and tried to apprehend the kids. My little brother told the social workers to leave. The social worker got mad. I said ‘Anyone can talk however they want. The kids don’t swear.’ She was calling a van to pick up the kids. I pushed the door closed. I called people to come and get the kids. I packed their clothes. The older kids left. I sent the younger kids away with people.<sup>19</sup>

Della was unhappy that she had a no-contact stipulation on her conditions of parole and could not see her spouse, who was the father of her child. She intended to continue her relationship with him despite the order. According to Della:

I got a breach even when he saw the baby, even though the court order allows it. I want the no-contact order off. We are going to see each other. Its infringing on our rights. My PO keeps insinuating I am pregnant and that is a breach. We walk around together. I will plead not guilty. I will fight it.<sup>20</sup>

When Arladene was arrested for apparently being drunk, she tried to run and then fought the officer who was arresting her. She claimed that she was not drunk and the officers refused to allow a breathalyser test which would prove her sobriety but they put her in the drunk tank instead. She showed her derision in open acts of defiance. Arladene recalls:

They made me take off my overalls. I threw them in the cop’s face. They put me into the drunk tank. I got everyone riled up and was causing sh\*t. They put me in a cell by myself. They wanted to humiliate me. I said, “I’m gonna make this the worst night of your life because I didn’t do anything wrong”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Geraldine” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December

<sup>20</sup> “Della,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

<sup>21</sup> “Arladene,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

Many of the strategies already discussed are short-term strategies. Short-term direct strategies engage dehumanization immediately, often with a marked lack of concern for consequences. Speaking out is not necessarily negative, it can affect positive change. Helen confronted her child's teacher about a decision which she felt was not fair. According to Helen:

The teacher said my daughter was going to fail this year, but I knew my daughter was good in that subject. It was not right. I felt this was discrimination. I talked to the teacher and was so straight with her that the teacher almost started crying. I said: "Many years ago we were not treated fairly, but you will not get away with this now. My daughter's not failing." I was very careful with my words. My daughter passed.<sup>22</sup>

Short-term direct resistance almost always involves the participant speaking to the government worker directly about the behaviour which they feel dehumanized them. This form of resistance is typically impulsive and unplanned and is a temporarily breach in the public transcript.

A long-term direct strategy is one that is carried out by the participant repeatedly, or with a future goal in mind. Often it is the case that the participant felt strongly about an issue but a long-term strategy is not carried out in the heat of anger. Helen initially used a short-term strategy until a non-Aboriginal person familiar with the system explained more efficient methods. She switched from a short-term to a long-term strategy and teaches others how to do the same. According to Helen:

I used to get frustrated and cry because I didn't have the knowledge or skill to deal with it. One day a non-Aboriginal supervisor said to me: "From now on don't get upset and cry. That can't solve anything and that's what they expect from you. It's their easy way out. From now on, deal with whatever is happening." It worked; my child is a winner every time. Aboriginal people have problems dealing with their children at school because all that hurt comes out. They scream at the teachers and pull their kids out of school. I tell my story to other parents. I tell them: "We want our children to succeed in school so our priority is to concentrate on their education, not the racism. They expect us to yell and scream but the issue is not being dealt with. We have to deal with the issues."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>23</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

Some participants reported that they accomplished their goal through direct resistance. Arladene continued to insist that she had not been the victim of domestic abuse, despite the fact that child protection worker insisted that she was. After several court appearances she was able to convince the judge that she was not abused. Arladene stated:

I fought them and took them to court four times. The judge eventually got tired. Social services said I fit the profile of the classic abused woman. I said: "If I was so oppressed, would I fight so hard against you?" I had always fought to be heard. I had never been that person. The judge saw that.<sup>24</sup>

When Helen was unhappy with a hiring policy that discriminated against Aboriginal people within the government agencies she worked for, she engaged in a long-term resistance process that led to a change in hiring policies. According to Helen:

When I got a government position there were all non-Aboriginal people working there even though Aboriginal people had diplomas. I found that the skills of people who live on the traplines, in the bush or as hunters were not considered. I noticed the wording of questions on the application was difficult to understand. I had to find a way to work with non-Aboriginal managers. I had to be creative. I waited and kept at it. I developed a way of questioning people about bush skills as experience. I brought to wording to layman's terms. They started hiring Aboriginal people. I resisted the government's ways of doing business and found my own way. It was not easy.<sup>25</sup>

A long-term direct strategy is usually better thought out than a short-term one since it required planning rather than impulse, and is more likely to succeed at achieving a goal.

Direct resistance, as a full breach of the public transcript, is also the most likely form to produce acts of retaliation from government workers. Government workers have a stake in legitimizing the system that they administer. Several of the women discussed the repercussions they faced as a result of their acts of resistance. Geraldine was instructed not to call her worker after she alleged that the worker was racist. According to Geraldine:

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<sup>24</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

Before my infant daughter was treaty, she was sick. I wanted the worker to pay for a \$60 prescription for antibiotics. The worker refused, so I called the ombudsman. They called the worker and gave her sh\*t. The worker asked why I phoned the ombudsman. I said: "If I was a white lady you'd probably say, 'Yes', right away." The social worker said it doesn't matter what colour you are. I said: "You act racist." Now I can't call my worker; my worker will call me when she's ready.<sup>26</sup>

Arladene claimed that her children were apprehended, not because of a child protection issues, but as retaliation for non-compliance. She said:

As long as you suck it up and do what they want they'll pretty much leave you alone... I will stand up against them. They tried so hard to get my kids because I wouldn't comply... They wanted to make an example of me. I'm sure of that.<sup>27</sup>

Claudia had a long struggle with her band for educational funding. After initially being refused, she remortgaged her house to pay for school but was eventually reimbursed through her band.

She stated: "I got reimbursed but it was ugly. Now they ignore me and they make snide remarks like, 'University kid but pushing 50'." <sup>28</sup>One participant reported being threatened by Aboriginal politicians as a result of making an allegation of nepotism. According to Katie:

I was talking to an Aboriginal politician about a problem with a school with a high drop out rate. It was sponsored by the tribal council. I was willing to bring it out because the previous year we went through the same thing. The executive director's relatives were getting ahead. I brought it out to certain people. I told the Aboriginal politician what was happening but didn't get far because I was threatened by someone in the upper level of the tribal council.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of other consequences, the participant has the satisfaction of having spoken her mind.

According to Scott: "The sense of personal release, satisfaction, pride, and elation – despite the actual risks often run – is an unmistakable part of how this first open declaration is

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<sup>25</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>26</sup> "Geraldine," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December 2006.

<sup>27</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>28</sup> "Claudia," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006.

<sup>29</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

experienced.”<sup>30</sup> Many participants displayed a sense of pride and satisfaction in having ‘told off’ a particular worker.

### **Indirect Resistance**

Indirect resistance includes resisting through a third party. Scott does not mention this form of resistance because peasants and slaves would be unlikely to have such a strategy available to them when dealing with a landlord or slave-owner because peasants had no advocates. The dynamics in these instances are similar to direct confrontation, except they go through another party who is perceived to have some power over influence of the government agency. To extend Scott’s analysis, it is likely that the advocate and the participant would share a private transcript of resistance on which the advocacy is based. The advocate mediates the partial emergence of the private transcript in a manner calculated to benefit the participant. Advocates also provide practical and moral support to participants who are struggling with government agencies.

Aboriginal women resist through the use of third parties such as community advocates and family members. Participants typically sought out advocates who are perceived as more powerful than themselves. The perceived effectiveness of an advocate was proportional to the power the advocate wielded in relation to a particular government service. One participant tried to get benefits on her own and when she failed an advocate was able to succeed. She thought that the race of the advocate and his/her position in a non-governmental organization were the deciding factors. Katie explains:

The YWCA has got more pull than we do. Going through there, they have to help us because these people accept us in whatever circumstance. They are able to get somewhere with social services. We can’t get anywhere on our own. Our word is

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<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance*, 208.

not good enough but they will listen to a white person in the office. It's not right but that's the government.<sup>31</sup>

Family also plays an important role in advocacy and many participants noted that family members will advocate for them, or vice versa. Claudia asked her First Nation for educational funding but was refused because her band would only fund specific programs. According to Claudia:

The band didn't think a BA was worth it because they wanted people in business admin, commerce or social work. My family went in. I needed the big guns to get my rights met. My family knew how to play band politics because we were always politically active. We came from a line of chiefs.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually Claudia's mother confronted the education director in his office. Claudia continues:

My mom called him on it. She told him, "You are impeding her treaty rights. Walk your talk! Everybody is entitled to a post-secondary education.' She reamed him out in front of everybody. She caught him at the entrance so he couldn't get out. His whole staff heard.<sup>33</sup>

Eventually Claudia received post-secondary funding.

Katie found that she had to try several advocates before she got assistance with furnishing and household items such as cookware and bedding. Although she was unemployable due to mental health issues she could not get assistance based on a letters from her doctor or psychologist. According to Katie:

I had to go to the premier's office for help with social services. Being on medical is not enough for social services. They will not accept it, even from the doctor. I had my psychologist and doctor talk to social services and tell them that I had nothing. That got nowhere. I have to help myself with my monthly cheques. One area suffers while I try to patch up other areas. They get a call from the Premier's office it's guaranteed to get help but not through a doctor or psychologist.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>32</sup> "Claudia," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006.

<sup>33</sup> "Claudia," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006.

<sup>34</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

Advocacy is not always as effective as the participants hoped as participants reported various levels of effectiveness through with this strategy. Participants stated that some advocates are ineffective, such as the Children's Advocate which they reported would not take certain cases. Similarly, the welfare appeal process was viewed as too biased or too slow to be useful.

Short-term indirect resistance uses a third-party advocate to deal with the immediate situation. In this form, an advocate will take on a certain immediate cause but does not advocate on a long-term basis. Although the same advocate may be used repeatedly, he or she is also sought out repeatedly. Bernadette moved to Saskatoon from her reserve because her brother was sick and she wanted to be close to him. Social assistance refused to give her benefits until a community advocate assisted her. According to Bernadette:

Welfare said they would not help me until I was here for six months. I said: "In six months my kids will be dead. I'm going to find out things." I went to an advocate and got a cheque for rent and \$150 for food, clothing and bills for me and my grandchild.<sup>35</sup>

Bernadette eventually became an advocate for the same agency that helped her.

Long-term indirect resistance takes place through the use of one or more advocates over an extended period of time. Helen used a short-term removal strategy to remedy the immediate situation, then she used a long-term strategy to deal with the harassment she experience at work. Although Helen had the qualification and experience to be hired under normal hiring procedures, her position was officially designated under the Affirmative Action policy designed for minorities. This led to resentment by co-workers and harassment at her job site. According to Helen:

They never treated me right and they would be rude. My supervisor did not support Affirmative Action. Finally, I got tired and went to my MLA about the

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<sup>35</sup> "Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006



unfair treatment. I had an Aboriginal women MLA and they did an investigation. I eventually transferred to a different department. Later, that department started to hire Aboriginal people. I took a stand and spoke out. Even though it didn't help me personally, it did help other Aboriginal women. That felt good. If you go back to that department now, the majority is Aboriginal women.<sup>36</sup>

She used an advocate to indirectly resist harassment. In the short-term, she transferred to another department which alleviated the immediate problem. Her advocate also commenced an investigation which made a long-term change in the department. The long-term change benefitted other Aboriginal women.

Similarly, Arladene used several third parties to thwart the child protection system permanently. Arladene had been in foster care since she was a young child. She was pregnant while living in foster care and believed that social services planned to place her child in foster care at birth. According to Arladene:

I became pregnant at fifteen while living in foster care. I knew social service had plans for my baby. While I did not want to keep the child, I did not want social services to get their hands on her and make the same sort of mistakes with this child as they had with me. While I was pregnant, I spoke to her family doctor who knew a couple. The couple hired a lawyer to arrange a private adoption. I didn't tell social services until after the child already taken home by the adoptive couple. They didn't like it but what could they do.<sup>37</sup>

In this situation, the final effect was permanent and benefitted a different person. She found that although she could not escape her situation, she could find a solution for her child using the help of her doctor and lawyer to arrange an adoption.

### **Hidden Resistance**

Since dehumanization is oppression, resistance is any action that counters dehumanization explicitly or implicitly. Hidden resistance mitigates the affects of dehumanization without

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<sup>36</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>37</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

directly confronting it. Scott refers to hidden resistance as: “a form of individual self-help.”<sup>38</sup>

Hidden resistance occurred when participants came to the realization that their needs would not be adequately met through government services. Typically, participants reported that they asked for help but were refused and then took action themselves by engaging in a self-help activity. By improving their own conditions, they temporarily removed themselves from the dehumanizing situation of poverty and dependency on inadequate social services. Hidden resistance may be the only tenable solution in certain situations because direct resistance can have significant consequences such as retaliation, and advocates are not always available or effective.

Scott refers to hidden resistance as: “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on.”<sup>39</sup> Dumpster diving, using pawn shops and prostitution are examples of strategies that participants used to meet their needs when government services are unavailable or inadequate.

Katie moved to Saskatoon without furniture or household items such as towels, dishes or cookware. She applied for an advance to buy some of these items and was refused. She responded by helping herself to whatever she could find in dumpsters in her neighbourhood. According to Katie:

I applied to get an advance. I asked for the reject letter about why they said no but didn't receive anything. They didn't say why. I look in the garbage to furnish my home. Stores throw stuff away. You have to do that. Digging in the garbage is not humiliating now. I am happy to find something in the garbage I can use.<sup>40</sup>

Katie eventually got an advance to help with these items but she found that the advance did not cover all her needs and so she continued dumpster diving.

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<sup>38</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi.

Katie also resorted to prostitution in an attempt to get furniture:

At least the prostitutes are getting something out of helping themselves, no matter how degrading and humiliating. I admire them. I tried it myself because my niece made it seem so easy. I thought I could get furniture. It was the only way to get money. I had been turned down by social services.<sup>41</sup>

Geraldine needed a food voucher to buy groceries for herself and her child. Geraldine could have made it to the social assistance office before it closed but the financial assistance worker could not make an appointment for that day or leave the voucher at reception.

According to Geraldine:

I asked my worker to help me with a voucher. The worker said I needed ID and I had to go home and get it. She wouldn't leave it out front for me. I phoned the receptionist and she said that she would get the voucher and keep it out front. The worker refused to leave it with the receptionist and said it was too late for an appointment so I would have to come back tomorrow. My mom had to pawn something so I could buy food for my baby.<sup>42</sup>

When social services refused to provide food for her child, Geraldine was able to help her child using money that her mom received at a pawn shop.. As with the previous three examples of hidden resistance, these strategies partially removed the participants from dependency on government services while simultaneously re-positioning them on the margins of the dominant society.

The previous examples are short term hidden resistance since their activities do not address dehumanization but are intended only to alleviate the immediate affects. Short-term hidden resistance also involved the participants avoiding dehumanizing events by running away from them. Running away is an assertion of humanity by refusing to accept the unacceptable by simply not being around. Arladene ran away from a foster care placement that she felt was

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<sup>40</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>41</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>42</sup> "Geraldine," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 8 December 2006.

unacceptable. She initially attempted to deal with the situation directly with her social worker but when this did not work she left the situation. According to Arladene:

I was put in an emergency foster home with a horrible woman. I had to live in the attic and had a list of chores to do while the other kids didn't lift a finger. I called the social worker who told me to make it work. So I ran away and went on road trips.<sup>43</sup>

Della was in a conflict laden situation with police. The police and social services often attended her home for a child protection concerns or to try and execute an arrest warrant for her oldest son. At the time of the interview, the police were looking for her oldest son. According to Della: "I was supposed to hide with my spouse today but my 16 year old wants me at home. I hide from the cops at my spouse's with my kids."<sup>44</sup> Short-term hidden strategies include removing oneself from the immediate situation while the larger problems continue unchecked. Avoidance strategies are hard to implement over the long term because, in most cases, the women are dependent on the services and cannot easily do without for an extended period.

Long-term hidden strategies include strategies of deception and manipulation which, unlike avoidance, can be carried out indefinitely. Some women chose self-help methods that they found most effective and these became intentional patterns of interactions. Helen learned how to work the system from the inside. Helen explains:

The people in the government made me become smarter and stronger and wiser. They made me become sneaky within the system because of how they treated me. I always had to work harder and find a way to go around things.<sup>45</sup>

Katie found that deceptive behaviour was the most effective way to resist dehumanization.

According to Katie:

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<sup>43</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>44</sup> "Della," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 1 December 2006.

Lying and stealing and cheating seem to get you somewhere. It is easier to bullsh\*t and get somewhere with social services. If you tell them the truth you don't get anywhere. If you bullsh\*t, you will get somewhere guaranteed.<sup>46</sup>

Freda made a habit of circumventing a worker she disliked by always dealing with another one:

I have two workers one good and the other not. That woman did not like me and acted like she was always mad at me. They are here to help out. I avoid that one and ask for the other one. I call first to see which one is working before I go in.<sup>47</sup>

Arladene reported that her mother utilized a multi-generational strategy to thwart child protection officials when it became obvious that Arladene would not be returned from foster care. She taught Arladene to remember her birth name. According to Arladene:

My mom told me: "Don't forget your name." At visits, my mom made me repeat my name over and over. Years later, I was at a community play when I saw an actress listed with the same last name as I had once had. After the play, I approached the women and found out that it was my father's sister. I was reunited with my father's family. They had never stopped looking for me.<sup>48</sup>

Arladene's mother never directly challenged the system. She acquiesced to Arladene remaining in foster care and her eventual placement for adoption to a non-Aboriginal family. Yet, as a result of her mother's hidden resistance, Arladene was eventually reunited with her birth family.

Of the eleven women, two did not have identified resistance stories although they had stories of dehumanization. Esther did not have a resistance story to share. At the time of the interview she was struggling with significant substance abuse problem. She was on the methadone program, her children were in foster care and she was on parole having recently been released from prison. She stated: "I'm not the type to stand up to them. I can ignore them but I can't stand up to white people." It was apparent that at that time she was in no position to

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<sup>45</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>46</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>47</sup> "Freda," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 7 December 2006.

<sup>48</sup> "Arladene," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

outwardly resist anything and that her resistance strategy was simply long-term avoidance of those she felt were oppressive by ignoring them. Isabel also did not share a resistance story. She was a young mom with a young daughter. She was fortunate enough to have a family that could support her financially when government services failed. This case seems to be a modified example of long-term advocacy where a third party continually solves the problem of dehumanization. Nonetheless, their stories do not appear this chapter.

### **Personal Growth and Community Empowerment**

Several participants talked about resistance in relation to their own personal growth and their concepts of giving back to their communities. Two women spoke of their ability to resist as being part of a personal growth experience and stated that their abilities to effectively resist have improved over time. For these two participants, resistance went hand-in-hand with healing and the wisdom that comes with age. Katie's ability to resist arose out of the strength she received from counseling. According to Katie:

I was not allowed as a kid to talk about my feelings so for years so my voice was silenced for years and I suffered in silence. I was feeling humiliated by government levels and trying to mix up with these clowns. Since seeing a psychologist I am a stronger person than I was years ago when I put up with BS from government levels.<sup>49</sup>

As she became strong, she was able to resist whereas she had not been before.

Helen saw her increased ability to speak out as a part of her personal growth as she got older. Her need to express herself began to outweigh the consequences. According to Helen: "I am older now. I said to myself: 'I don't care. I'm going to say what I have to say.' I'm not the only Aboriginal woman speaking out. They have no choice but to listen."<sup>50</sup> For Katie, struggles

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<sup>49</sup> "Katie" Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>50</sup> "Helen" Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

with the government have also been an unlikely source of strength. She found that she could better understand other people in her situation and could use this understanding to find ways to support them. According to Katie:

I would have to thank them because each struggle I have, through them I grow stronger and finds ways to deal not only with them not only for myself but for my people. I can help them and say I understand rather than look down on them because they are on welfare. I would like to give something back so they can hold on to what dignity they have left.<sup>51</sup>

She took her negative experiences with government agencies and turned them into something positive for other members of her community. Helen similarly reported:

“Although racism is negative and hurtful, yet it gives me strength and drive. All experience is to my benefit.”<sup>52</sup> Claudia pointed out that Aboriginal people hold a spiritual belief that they are guided during their lives and there is a greater purpose for events happening now than is immediately obvious.<sup>53</sup>

In some instances, strength to resist comes from being able to give back to the community. Helen stated that she was better able to deal with the harassment at her work place after receiving her status card. For her, being officially recognized as a member of her First Nations community was a life changing event: “Now that I am an Indian that gave me strength. I knew that I had people behind me.”<sup>54</sup> Her sense of community combined with age gave her strength to express herself. Connection with the community comes from the very human need to belong and to contribute to the welfare of others.

Contributing to community is especially important for women who were treated as though they were simply a burden on society. Having experience difficult situations, some of the

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<sup>51</sup> “Katie” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>52</sup> “Helen,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>53</sup> “Claudia,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006

women interviewed sought to help others in a similar situation. Bernadette became a community advocate because of her own experiences with housing and social services. She works for all poor people regardless of race or gender:

I work as an advocate with poor women and men. I talk to social services and thinks they're nuts. I give it all I have everyday. Sometimes I win and sometimes I don't. If I don't, I will go back to my office and think about how to help that person. My grandson wants to be a fireman and to save peoples lives. I am saving people's lives by talking for them.<sup>55</sup>

Community is both a source of strength which helps empower participants to resist and a motivation for resistance. In many interviews, women cited family and community members on whose behalf they were resisting. Some participants found that they were able to speak for others in their community even when they could not easily speak for themselves. Katie told me:

I had to speak for the elderly on reserve. They were going through a lot but nobody was listening. I had to bring it out at one general meeting. I learned to speak for others. I spoke for the silent voices in the ground. I had helped put John Paul Crawford<sup>56</sup> behind bars. I care about people. I will put my dignity aside but will speak for somebody else because nobody was there for me.<sup>57</sup>

According to the women interviewed, giving and receiving is an important part of being part of a community. According to Helen:

When I start to fight, it's about all the Aboriginal women I can think of. It's not just about me. I get strength and power from doing for all Aboriginal women. I was not just doing it for myself but for my children and grandchildren...for all those who are coming. That is why I had a real passion, strength and energy. It's not easy but it will make a difference. One day our grandchildren will have it easier. It will be easier for all those children.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

<sup>55</sup> "Bernadette," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Crawford is a serial killer who preyed on Aboriginal women in the Saskatoon area.

<sup>57</sup> "Katie," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

<sup>58</sup> "Helen," Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.



Although the participants experienced hardship as a result of dependence on government agencies, they also experienced personal growth and a sense of community. The fact that some benefits may have resulted from hardship does not excuse the violation of humanity. It does, however, emphasize the resilience and strength of these participants.

### **Aboriginal Women Speak on Resistance**

Some participants spoke directly to their resistance to oppression from government agencies. These following opinions cannot be easily incorporated into the narratives but must be included in the analyses to fully reflect what was spoken. Participants also explicitly identified self-determination and spoke of resistance as a natural consequence to loss of self-determination. According to Arladene: “Personal self-determination is important. Social services should offer services based on the needs identified by women. We are not all the same. We are individuals. They should expect the reaction. They should expect us to be agitated.”<sup>59</sup> Participants felt that government policies attempt to control them and make decisions for them that should rightfully be theirs. This occurs in non-Aboriginal agencies as well as in Aboriginal agencies that are modelled after non-Aboriginal bureaucratic institutions. According to Claudia:

Band employees took on the bureaucracy. They learned it so well from Indian Affairs that now they do it to their own people. Indian Affairs was paternalistic and now our leadership is paternalistic. It’s like cattle with a cattle guard. Cattle are so trained not to go past the cattle guard they will not go, even when there is no cattle guard, just line painted on the ground. They will not step over the lines. This is where we stop. We can’t go any further. This is what has happened to our people.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> “Arladene,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>60</sup> “Claudia,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006.

Claudia was describing internalized colonialism as discussed by Paulo Freire.<sup>61</sup> In this model, the oppressed take on the roles of the oppressor creating a duality in which they are simultaneously both oppressor and oppressed. This results in a situation where the colonized begin colonizing themselves by imposing or perpetuating the same types unequal structures which had previously been imposed by the colonizer. According to Claudia, the leadership of her First Nation imposed upon her the limitations that had hitherto been imposed upon the First Nation by Indian Affairs.

Participants spoke of the personal power of other women in their lives. They described the strong bonds that exist among women that serves as a source of inspiration. Arladene described her mother, a prostitute and a drug addict, as a truly authentic person and a strong woman: “At least my mom was real. She did what she had to do to survive. She knew what it was like to be on the total bottom of absolutely everything. My mom had to sacrifice.”<sup>62</sup> Women in this study never perceived themselves, or other women, as passive victims. They perceived themselves as powerful and tough despite whatever circumstance they found themselves in. They care for themselves, their families and others in the community. Bernadette speaks for many when she states: “Never underestimate the power of a woman when it concerns a child or her husband. Don’t mess around with them. They’re tough, these women.”<sup>63</sup>

Claudia also spoke about the interconnectedness of power and self-determination in Cree terms:

*Kiy-buk-chi* means ‘never give up’ but it is more. It is an action word. A person fulfilling a higher purpose has a right, a promise and a responsibility. *Ah-ga-mi-mo* means ‘to keep going.’ Your dreams are alive. Don’t let them die. They are a part of who you are and your purpose in life. Things are going to work out. It also

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<sup>61</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 45.

<sup>62</sup> “Arladene,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 16 November 2006.

<sup>63</sup> “Bernadette,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 21 November 2006.

contains a hidden promise of help. Keep going with your heart, body and soul and nothing can get in your way. The Creator is with you.<sup>64</sup>

The basis for resistance strategies exists within Aboriginal communities and traditional teachings. Claudia claims that these teachings are alive in Cree culture and that she is aware of them because she was trained as a leader in her community. Claudia was the only participant who was able to express her motives for resistance as originating from her Aboriginal traditional cultural teachings.

Participants saw themselves as an integral part of a larger community. Aboriginal women also had a collective, or community power. Sharing these stories is also important. Helen explains: “For Aboriginal women, it’s important to share these stories with each other. It’s not easy but it will make a difference. One day our grandchildren will have it easier.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The women interviewed in this study shared many powerful stories about how they interacted with government agencies and they also engaged in their own analyses. They told many important stories about resistance but, unfortunately, all the stories cannot be included in this paper. The paper would have been too long and repetitious since many of the stories were similar. I have chosen those stories which best exemplify the points under discussion in my analysis. Through the stories, I have identified a pattern of resistance in its many forms. An Aboriginal woman in a dependency relationship with government agencies encounters situations that deny the basic humanity of either herself or a significant other such as a spouse or child. Aboriginal women engage in resistance by rejecting dehumanization using one or more strategies

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<sup>64</sup> “Claudia,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 28 November 2006.

<sup>65</sup> “Helen,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 9 December 2006.

in the forms of direct resistance, indirect resistance and hidden resistance to reassert their humanity.

The official transcript asserts that the benefits provided to Aboriginal women are adequate and fair as spelled out in the mandates established to serve the best interest of both the clients and society in general. There is a private script which challenges the fairness and adequacy of service from government agencies. The participants used the private transcript to formulate their own ideas about what the government was doing or attempting to do. This private transcript surfaced in their stories of resistance, as well as in the participants' own analyses. The three forms of resistance represent three types of interrelationships between the public and private transcripts. In direct resistance, the public transcript is breached and the private transcript emerges. This occurs in times of great stress and may bring with it risk of retaliation. Direct resistance included speaking out, writing letters and physical acts of defiance. Indirect resistance was accomplished through a third party who was complicit in the resistance by acting as a mediator between the participant and the agency. In this type, the public transcript is only partially breached. The participants also described hidden forms of resistance such as self-help in the form of socially unacceptable acts, running away and becoming manipulative.

Personal growth and community empowerment emerged as both a cause and a result of resistance. Participants drew power from their experiences and their community support, and in return used this power to resist. The participants were especially empowered to resist on behalf of the Elders, children and other women in their communities.

The women also made their own analysis where the Aboriginal values of self-determination, community and the power of women surface strongly. The analysis given by the participants emphasized the loss of self-determination resulting from dependency on government

agencies, the importance of community and the power of women. It is not surprising that dependent women, whose lives are in a large part determined by ever-changing government policies, would identify self-determination a major concern. It is precisely the power to determine the direction of their lives that women lose when living in a dependent and marginalized state. It is notable, however, that politically powerless women focus on what power they do have, again, which is derived from their connection to community and the force of their character.

## CHAPTER 6 COMMUNITY RESPONSE

This chapter arises out of the focus group sessions with the women participants in this study and additional interviews with two urban Aboriginal women Elders. The primary goals of the focus groups were to request feedback from the participants on my research to date. The objectives were to: (1) share my research findings which included my analyses of their stories and some of the conceptual categories I used in my analyses of their stories, (2) share the findings of the research I conducted on the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and (3) bring the women together for open discussions.

Each session began with introductions and then I provided my analyses of the experiences they shared in their interviews. I explained to the woman that I understood what they shared with me as experiences in dehumanization and resistance. I also explained the United Nations Declaration to them, especially those articles that I believed directly related to their experiences. Following my presentation the rest of the focus group was handed over to the women. The women discussed this new knowledge and applied it to their own experiences. As described below, the women enthusiastically responded to this new information by telling additional stories and expanding on their previous accounts. Most significantly, the women discussed this new knowledge and applied it to their own situations engaging in deeper reflection and analyses than they had during the interviews.

The purpose of the interviews with the Elders was to hear their stories of resistance and to get their insights into the effectiveness of their resistance strategies over time. In addition I shared with them my analysis of the interview data from the interviews with the other women for their insight and feedback.

### **Focus Groups**

The women in the focus groups were particularly interested in knowing more about the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Their discussion of their interactions with government agencies became increasingly rights-based as they reflected on their own experiences. With this new information they discussed what they were entitled to and based on this entitlement, what they had been denied. There was also more discussion of racial discrimination and unfair treatment by agency workers.

The themes in the focus groups were the same as those in the individual interviews but they went into more depth with their criticisms of those government agencies they had negative experiences with. It was evident that in the company of others with similar experiences the women felt freer to voice their concerns and share. My experience in this instance is similar to that of James C. Scott who noted in his studies that the hidden transcript is shared more fully within the groups experiencing oppression, than it is with outsiders.

### **Focus Group Analyses of Oppression**

Having gained insight into the United Nations *Declaration of Human Rights* the first response from participants in both focus groups was to share additional stories of oppression by government agencies. The stories were similar to the ones that were told in the individual interviews but the analyses provided by the women themselves focused on the denial of human rights to material resources and fair treatment. The participant did not usually differentiate between agencies, referring to all government agencies as ‘them’ and ‘they’, although some participants mentioned specific agencies.

Darlene agreed that social assistance was insufficient to meet her basic needs but she felt that she had no alternative but to rely on it. She stated:

I know they don't really allow you to have some of those like food, clothing, shelter and there's no place else so sometimes you can't get it. If you're hungry and sure you can have a job but that doesn't help you get anything right now. You can go to the foodbank and that's about it. You have to go through so much work and sometimes they just say 'no' or be really rude to you just because of who you are.<sup>1</sup>

Florence believed that her Aboriginal background had an affect on the quality of services she received from social assistance. She claimed that she had more difficulty accessing social assistance benefits once she was identified as Métis. Florence said: "When they found out I was getting funded by Métis Society, they talk to me differently and everything. I mean it seemed like they're way much harder to me once they found out."<sup>2</sup> In one discussion, Florence also shared her anxiety over renewing contact with a government agency. She explained:

Yesterday, I finally had to phone them because I'm not sure how I'm going to pay my rent this month. I still have this whole process to go through and I'm scared of that and what they're going to be like. It's just the fear of having to go back to them.<sup>3</sup>

Emma had a similar experience: "I totally get what your talking about...There is a whole month that I had no money, actually two months. Thank God I had real awesome landlords."<sup>4</sup>

Participants agreed that they were not satisfied with the services they were forced to rely on for survival. But as a result of the focus groups, they reframed their understanding of their experiences as issues of rights and denial of rights.

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<sup>1</sup> "Darlene," Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>2</sup> "Florence," Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>3</sup> "Florence," Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>4</sup> "Emma," Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.



The participants also spoke to a loss of personal freedom. Bertha stated: “It’s the freedom of choice we lost totally and completely. People are always telling you what to do.”<sup>5</sup> Clare linked information about self-determination and family dissolution to sections of the *Indian Act*. She referred to a section which, prior to 1985, stripped an Indian woman and her children of Indian status upon her marriage to a non-status man. This section was later rescinded so Indian women kept their status but their children may not be entitled to it.<sup>6</sup> Clare state:

The government decides for you who you can marry and can’t marry. It’s that section of the membership code or the Indian Act. I remember that when they finally declared that we cannot lose out status when we marry. What I didn’t realize is that my kids got affected. They pretty much choose for you who you can marry. I never looked at it that way but that’s right.<sup>7</sup>

After hearing about the *Declaration of Human Rights*, Bertha concluded: “They take away your rights.”<sup>8</sup> Emma put her experiences into a framework of dehumanization when she stated:

“We’re a case number to a lot of them. We don’t even have names.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Accessing Information**

The women in the focus groups discussed their experiences accessing information about their eligibility for available programs and benefits. The participants believed that it was their right to be informed of program benefits and that government agencies, as the providers of these

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<sup>5</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The Bill C-31 amendment to the *Indian Act* was a response to the United Nations ruling discussed in the Introduction of this study.

<sup>7</sup> “Clare,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>8</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>9</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

benefits, were responsible for disseminating relevant information. Anna explained the frustration experienced when she got the ‘run-around’ at social services:

You just feel like you don’t know enough of the system to know what to say to get the help and don’t know the right people to talk to. If you’re talking to the wrong people all the time you just feel like you don’t know where to go from there.<sup>10</sup>

Many participants expressed similar sentiments that they were denied access to information on benefits, programs and services which they now realized were rights. Bertha explained: “And another thing that they do is they withhold information...things that you’re eligible for, they will not tell you right out.”<sup>11</sup> Many had the experience of finding out that they were eligible for a certain benefit, program or service but had not been informed of it by their worker at the relevant agency. Participants were not sure how to get the appropriate information when they could not trust the government agency to tell them. They were also concerned about other members of the community, such as seniors, who were in the same situation. Clare told us: “The elderly are totally affected by that and they don’t know their rights. That’s the thing, they’re stuck right there in limbo.”<sup>12</sup> The women in the groups stressed that lack of access to information is a significant concern and a violation of their rights.

The participants also questioned the altruistic motives of government agencies and claimed that information was intentionally withheld for the benefit of the agency. Bertha stated:

A lot of women give up ‘cause the fight is too hard and it’s too much. There are so many things against them and I think that ignorance is one of them. It’s just not knowing the proper information and I guarantee no social worker is going to tell you everything you need to know for your benefit. Everything they tell you is for their own benefit and for what *they* want. So you’re left without all the

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<sup>10</sup> “Anna,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>11</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>12</sup> “Clare,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

information for you to make an informed choice, because nobody can make a totally informed choice without all the facts.<sup>13</sup>

Emma experienced difficulty in finding out what programs and services were available and concluded that the information was purposefully withheld:

No one was going to tell me about anything. It was easier to keep me right under their thumb and just tell me what to do instead of allowing me to have a brain and truly live my life for myself.<sup>14</sup>

Discussions about the right to access to information did not arise in the individual interviews, yet emerged and became a significant topic in both focus groups. It appears that, having been informed of their rights under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the participants began to ponder what their rights were and why they had not been informed of these rights earlier.

### **Coercion and Retaliation**

Participants reported attempts at coercion and the possibility of retaliation by government workers which affected their relationships with government agencies, particularly social assistance and child protection. Bertha stated that her worker's attitude was: "If you don't do it, well, we're going to cut you off", that kind of stuff and well, you need financial help"<sup>15</sup> Emma deeply resented children protection workers who threatened to apprehend her children when she did not comply with the workers requests. According to Emma:

I think it is a form of extortion because this person here is valuable to me, valuable to life, valuable to who I am and what I do. And to use that as a pawn to make me

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<sup>13</sup> "Bertha," Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>14</sup> "Emma," Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>15</sup> "Bertha," Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

do something, to me is a form of extortion because they use my child as a bargaining chip, as money.<sup>16</sup>

Emma also reported that she believed some government agency actions toward her might be retaliatory in nature. She stated: “I think their interest in me had nothing to do with the safety or the wellbeing of my children, period. It was some axe to grind against me.”<sup>17</sup>

Fear of retaliation by workers was a significant dynamic for the participants and it affected their ability to interact with government agencies in a positive manner. Anna stated:

Its bad enough you feel that people aren’t listening to you because of who you are, of who they think you are. Then to just not have a voice. I’ve been in a position where I haven’t been able to say and do and feel free to speak my mind out of fear of retaliation against me.<sup>18</sup>

Still they resisted despite anticipated consequences. Emma stated: “I fought them every single step of the way....Really, what are they going to do? What more could they possibly do to me that they haven’t already done or tried?”<sup>19</sup> Participants found these experiences oppressive but were clearly proud of their resistance, even if it proved nearly futile.

### **Ageing and Personal Growth**

Ageing and personal growth were significant topics in the first focus group which consisted of relatively older women (in their forties), while the second group (in their twenties) did not raise any of these points. The older women reported that their increased life experience had significantly changed how they dealt with conflict with government agencies. When they

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<sup>16</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>17</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>18</sup> “Anna,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>19</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

were younger they engaged in direct resistance—they acted out their anger or they ran away. For example, Emma stated: “I fought them every single step of the way.”<sup>20</sup> Older participants claimed that as they grew and aged the strategies they employed were more positive. Bertha said: “I used to let people walk all over me. I just remember I used to get mad and then I would lash out. ... That’s how I was when I was young.”<sup>21</sup> Later in the discussion she stated: “Now I can deal with it in a positive manner. Before, I used to fight. I’d rather fight. That’s how I thought the way things were.”<sup>22</sup> Participants believed that their skills for dealing with conflict had improved over time and they were now skilled at knowing who to talk to or how to make a request or a complaint. Clare stated: “I’ll deal with it in a positive manner, like dealing with things that are bothering me. Its important you go through the right channels of getting things done.”<sup>23</sup> While both groups used anger and running away perceived as fight or flight defence mechanisms, the older participants had learned other more positive strategies to interact with government agencies in what they perceived as a more productive manner.

The older and more experienced participants also responded to the concept of running away differently. According to Bertha: “I find that when I have to deal with them I can’t run away. I used to run away a long time ago. I used to run away all the way to New York. They still followed me, those a\*\*holes.”<sup>24</sup> They found that strategy of running away was ineffective. Conversely, the younger participants in the second group viewed it as a natural and legitimate

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<sup>20</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>21</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>22</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>23</sup> “Clare,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

reaction to difficult circumstances. Emma ran away as a purposeful strategy to thwart government workers. She explained: “All I did was I let them think I was doing what they wanted and I just grabbed my kids and I moved.”<sup>25</sup> These results suggest that resistance strategies are not static but appear to evolve over time from short-term emotion based reactions to more thought-out long term and goal based strategies.

### **Individual-Community Empowerment**

The idea of giving back to the community was a very significant topic for both groups. All participants reported that they had considerable informal support within their family and social groups which they found significant and beneficial. Some participants believed this community support was part of their Aboriginal cultures and most viewed it as a survival strategy. Clare stated: “That’s a big part of our culture though, First Nations people, no matter how poor you are, you still got to go out of your way to help out.”<sup>26</sup> Giving and helping occurs within informal networks of friends and community members. This helps to fill the gaps in social services while avoiding some of the negative consequences of dealing with a government agency. Emma stated:

I know its hard and I know what it feels like to have no one to ask and even when you do ask, you get crapped all over for even asking and its like that, shame and whatever. With us there’s no shame in that. I don’t feel shame when I get help from my friends.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>25</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>26</sup> “Clare,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>27</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

Informal social networks help Aboriginal women by providing assistance when government social services are inadequate and perceived of as oppressive or stigmatizing.

The protection of children was of particular importance in the social networking and giving-back. All participants thought that caring for children, whether their own or others, was extremely important activity. Bertha stated: “All kids are your own...all kids. Like if you’re feeding one, feed them all, like whoseever’s there. You make a big pot of whatever. You feed them all, you know.”<sup>28</sup> Emma stated: “Within my group, we help each other with kids’ clothes, you know. Everything from plates to food, you know, like we really go out of our way to help each other.”<sup>29</sup> The importance of sharing and community came out most strongly when discussing children.

The wellbeing of children is also an important motivator in resistance. Most women reported that they did not engage in resistance after they had children and in response to their children’s needs. Clare stated: “I’m going to have an 18 year old kid. I’ve never fought so hard as I did these last 18 years because I find I fought harder for my children than I ever did for myself.”<sup>30</sup> Protection of children and the future generation provides compelling reasons to struggle to make changes in the current situation. Emma stated:

I have to think about exactly what is it that I want them to get from me. And what I want them to understand is that they have something to say, that they are important, they’re powerful, they’re smart, resourceful. All of those. That’s what I want them to get from me...Just because my parents had a tough time and my grandparents too, that doesn’t mean within one generation there can’t be change.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Bertha,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>29</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

<sup>30</sup> “Clare,” Focus Group 1, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 6 June 2007.

<sup>31</sup> “Emma,” Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.

The desire for improved conditions for all the children in their family and social groups transforms a personal activity into a community activity. As well, their concern for future generations extends the giving-back from the present into the future.

At the end of each focus group, the participants expressed that their involvement in this research project, especially the reporting of the research findings, were a positive experience. They expressed their hopes that it would make a difference at some level, for themselves personally, and for others. Emma stated:

For me being able to talk about the things I went through as a child, as a youth, and even as an adult for me is a part of my healing. It's a part of my growing and giving back. Perhaps these powers that be will get what we're saying and change it for the better so that my daughter or sons can at least have a better outlook of what's to come.<sup>32</sup>

The women conveyed to me that they were pleased that this research is being conducted. They stated that it was meaningful to them on a personal level and they hoped it might have some impact on government agency workers and how they conduct business.

### **Elders**

The participants were asked to reflect on past experiences with government agencies and thus provide personal reminiscences in the form of oral history. The Elders, however, were asked to reflect upon the research results themselves and came with a forward looking solution of education and advocacy as a remedy for oppression of Aboriginal women interacting with oppressive government agencies.

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<sup>32</sup> "Emma," Focus Group 2, Personal communications. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 15 June 2007.



### **Kohkom Marji**

I interviewed the late Marji Pratt-Turo from George Gordon's First Nation in Saskatchewan in her home in Saskatoon in August of 2007. Marji was an activist in both Canada and the United States from the 1960s until her health declined in the last few years. She told me she was active in the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the affiliated women's movement, Women of All Red Nations (WARN) in the 1960s and early 1970s. Throughout the interview she emphasized the value of collective action which she believed is the basis for social change. In her experience, Aboriginal people were most powerful when organized as a group for strategic collective action. She believed that a significant amount of the progress made with the government was because they had banded together as a group and had well-planned strategies prior to confronting the government. In Marji's view the movement was a result of the level and severity of oppression people experienced rather than the will of any particular individuals. She stated:

It was inevitable. If we hadn't done it someone else would have because the oppression was so bad....So we made some change and, like I said, if we hadn't done it someone else would have. It was just that time when change was needed.<sup>33</sup>

Marji made the decision to act, and given the situation for Aboriginal people at that point in history, personal danger was not a consideration. The need, she stated, was too overwhelming.

Marji also spoke of women's involvement. Although AIM was a predominantly male organization, women were heavily involved through WARN which was established to address issues affecting women and their families. Women from WARN took part in AIM activities including active resistance. Marji stated: "We weren't afraid. We were right in there with the

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<sup>33</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

men. And behind the lines we carried guns and worked in the foxholes.”<sup>34</sup> She stated it never occurred to her or any of the other women to back down. At the Wounded Knee stand-off in South Dakota,<sup>35</sup> Marji was proud that she took her turn in the foxholes with the men and that she shot out the floodlights trained on the protestors. She also discussed another time when she had a physical struggle with a sheriff outside a courthouse when she felt that he had mistreated her daughter.

Over time, Marji said, there have been changes in Aboriginal women’s attitudes. She sadly claimed that women have stepped down from being leaders and activists to accepting a lesser role in Aboriginal communities. She believed that women were becoming acclimated to the way things are done in the dominant society and are increasingly taking a second seat to men.<sup>36</sup> This change in behaviour, Marji noticed, occurred over several decades. She stated: “In the sixties women were ready to make change and in the eighties women are able to accept what their lot is regardless of what it is, good or bad, and I don’t know what the difference is.”<sup>37</sup> She had experienced the strength and power of collective resistance and viewed individual resistance as weak and ineffectual. Marji’s understandings of resistance were informed by her experiences with the Aboriginal movements of the sixties. Since then she continued being involved in the Saskatoon based Grandmothers for Justice group but her declining health conditions prevented her from taking a leadership role.

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<sup>34</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

<sup>35</sup> On February 27, 1973, the Pine Ridge Reservation was the site of the 71 day Wounded Knee Stand-Off between AIM activists and FBI agents supported by the National Guard.

<sup>36</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

## Kohkom Leona

I interviewed Leona Tootoosis from Poundmaker First Nation in Saskatchewan in her home in Saskatoon on February 2, 2008. She is a long-time community activist in Saskatoon and presently works for the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN). She talked about her own historic struggles with government agencies and reported that while her contact with government agencies were often negative, she found that in the long term it had its positive aspects:

But, you know, having gone to residential schools those years, they made us strong. They didn't weaken me. They made me more strong by being there 'cause we were treated so rough, talked to like that all the time, so it didn't fizz on me.<sup>38</sup>

Leona continues to rely on her strengths to advocate for other people and voluntarily works as an unofficial community advocate. She states that one year she was able to lobby the provincial government to distribute the social assistance cheque before Christmas, rather than after as they had planned. She likens her experiences to those of other Aboriginal women, except that she did not give up in the face of adversity as some did and she refused to listen to negative talk. Leona was concerned that some women did not have the fight needed to make change. She thought that the negative things that Aboriginal women hear about themselves could cause them to give up fighting. She explains: "They just totally gave up the way government workers talked to us. So these people went all through what I went through too, but there was an odd one here and there who didn't listen."<sup>39</sup> It was those who ignored negative talk that succeeded.

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<sup>37</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

From Leona's perspective the big problem is that government systems do not work for Aboriginal people. Leona did not think that hiring Aboriginal people as government workers would resolve any issues either. She stated: "When the girls work at the social services, you might as well talk to a white woman in there. They follow the system, not through their kindness. They just follow."<sup>40</sup> Working at FSIN, Leona saw limited self-government as solution. She stated that Aboriginal people need to advance their own policies and regulations and handle their own programs instead of following the regulations and guidelines set out by government agencies.

### **Isolation, Anger, Education and Advocacy**

Both Elders discussed the isolation of Aboriginal women, futility of acting out of anger, the potential benefits of education and the need for some kind of advocacy services for those dealing with the government. The Elders expressed concern for women who had little supports and suggested that the government agencies were not providing useful services. Leona stated:

Those social workers, they're not doing their work because clients are being refused left and right what they're entitled to with social services. I would not be a part of a system that's no good for us. That's just like the justice system. Doesn't work for us.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, they thought that women suffered from their contact with government agencies and that the suffering occurred in isolation from any support systems. Marjie stated: "They need the group. They need at least one other person to be with them out against this negative. The

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<sup>40</sup>.Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

negative is so strong.”<sup>42</sup> Dependency and lack of services takes its toll on people, who cannot leave the system even if they wanted. Leona stated: “And a lot of people are helpless if they don’t go back to the agency. Where else can they go to? Its just a terrible, terrible thing to go through for them.”<sup>43</sup> The Elders expressed that government agencies negatively impacted Aboriginal women and were concerned about their isolation and limited choices when dealing with the government. Leona thought that urban Aboriginal women have difficulties due to the affects of poverty and the lack of necessary physical materials. Her own coping skills included keeping busy with household tasks such as sewing, knitting or gardening. Leona stated:

That’s what kept me sane, keeping myself busy. Nowadays, what have they got to be busy with? They don’t own a home. They don’t have a garden patch. They have no means of getting yarn, even a crochet hook. They’re so limited in the money they get from welfare.<sup>44</sup>

The lack of basics in physical resources and moral support, as well as a lack of options was a concern.

Both women spoke about the futility reacting, of action originating from anger and strong negative emotion. Marji believed that an angry reaction would not be useful although she acknowledged that many women react in this manner. She stated: “I think mostly by reacting by, number one by reacting and cussing them off -not any helpful way at all. I think the majority of the women go through that.”<sup>45</sup> Leona explained further that she believed that anger has a negative effect on the individual personally and that this anger could extend into other areas of her life.

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<sup>42</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

She stated: “Anger is another thing that is easy to do and it irritates your life regardless how long you live. That causes sickness, so that anger had got to be done away.”<sup>46</sup> Regardless of their reaction, the women would eventually have to return to the government agency so reacting with anger or running away has limited positive results. On the other hand, Leona expressed much frustration about the limited options women have available to them: “But where do these people go when they want to get mad? Where so they turn to? Nowhere! They pretty much have to come back and beg. That’s the demeaning part.”<sup>47</sup> Marji added that an individual complaint, particularly borne of anger, would not be heard and if it was then a worker may be able to retaliate against the woman. She stated:

The only person that gets to receive the complaint is the one person that you’re dealing with and that person might just totally ignore your complaint and then would normally just not pay any attention to it except maybe to cut down your services.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, the Elders take the position that anger based resistance is not a useful strategy because it can harm the individual and is replete with negative consequences.

Both women stressed the value of education as empowerment and resistance. Marji stressed the importance of informal education that comes from collective experience handed down through the generations. She stressed that women today would benefit from knowing the experiences of previous generations:

I think that if people were to know what we went through in the sixties and seventies or if they were to know about banding together, about an all inclusive

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<sup>46</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Marji Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

resistance, I think they would probably pick up on it and use it but I don't think they know.<sup>49</sup>

Marji also thought that community programs would benefit and empower women by providing grassroots support. She was an advocate of empowering communities through informal education, counseling and self-help programs that she found beneficial during her AIM activities in the sixties and later. She believed that Aboriginal people were best equipped to help and support other Aboriginal people.

Leona Tootoosis was formally educated as a social worker and thought that a more formal education would be beneficial for Aboriginal women. She stated:

The major thing is education. If those people were educated they would have known the government procedure and the etiquette. And look at that anger came in there; they're so frustrated with the system. If they would have had more education they would have a broader view of life, not as narrow minded.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, Leona thought that community programs, particularly anger management, would benefit Aboriginal women. Formal and informal education would be beneficial to women who must deal with government agencies.

The Elders suggested advocacy as a solution possibly through an agency set up for that either as a grassroots organization or as a non-governmental organization. Marji stated:

A single person confronting a single person, its just not too helpful at all because then that person who's in charge can just ignore it, put it aside... I would suggest to anyone that was going through this to go through advocacy and to find an agent, an agency so they could write letters and formally complain because if its not formal then its not attended to at all.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Marjie Pratt-Turo, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 17 August 2007.

Similarly, Leona stated: “Who do they turn to? Nobody! I think they got to create the position like that. And mind you that person would be very busy...There’s gotta be a position. I mean, away from social services. Who wants to go there?”<sup>52</sup> Both Elders agreed that community advocacy or an advocate’s office would be beneficial to Aboriginal women dealing with government agencies.

### Summary

The focus groups served the purpose of bringing participants together to inform them of the results of the interviews and gather their responses. The participants discussed their new understanding of their rights and the denial of these rights as well as their anxiety over negative interactions with government agency workers. They also discussed their personal growth as a result of life experience which allowed the older women to respond to dehumanization more effectively than when they were young. Additionally, they discussed a reciprocal relationship of individual-community empowerment in which an individual and their community simultaneously give and receive strength and support from each other. Communities empower a woman by meeting her physical and social needs. As individuals experience personal growth as a result of this empowerment, they develop the capability and desire to give back their communities, particularly the children. In the focus groups, the private transcript emerged more than it had in individual interviews as the participants affirmed each others experiences.

The interviews with Elders served to get a more experienced perspective on the research. The Elders understood that anger and isolation were results of interaction with government

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<sup>52</sup> Leona Tootoosis, Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 2 February 2008.



agencies but were not inevitable, and they stressed education as a remedy for anger, and advocacy as an alternative to isolation.

The community response suggests that attitudes and strategies of resistance evolve and change over time. This was unexpected because Scott's study does not describe a of resistance strategies over time; in his study forms of resistance are static. Yet my study suggests that resistance strategies change over time as women age and become more experienced. The initial response to dehumanization appears to be emotion-based and impulsive forms of resistance. Women reacted to dehumanization by becoming angry and isolated, particularly when they were young and inexperienced, and react with outbursts of emotion. As they became parents, their desire to effectively resist for the sake of their children increased and their resistance strategies evolved. Older women began to understand their anger and develop longer term and more thoughtful strategies. They began view the community as a source of empowerment and to consider what they could give back to the community, particularly to the children. As the women became Elders, they let go of their anger and became thoroughly entrenched in a reciprocal relationship with their communities. Their response to dehumanization shifted to long-term strategies of individual self-help and community advocacy.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

By way of a series of narrative oral histories, focus groups and interviews with Aboriginal Elders, this study has examined the everyday resistance of sixteen Aboriginal women to dehumanization by government agencies.<sup>1</sup> The dehumanization of Aboriginal women occurs when they are denied their basic human rights guaranteed in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Dehumanization manifests as the denial of basic subsistence needs, poor treatment in the form of abuse, harassment and discrimination, and a loss of self-determination. It is met with resistance in an attempt to restore humanity. Everyday forms of resistance are small acts of daily personal resistance which do not usually challenge the prevailing social order. They are based upon a complex subaltern ideology expressed in private transcripts which are usually hidden from the dominant group. Aboriginal women use the private transcripts as the ideological basis for at least three forms of everyday resistance: direct, indirect and hidden. In direct resistance the private transcript emerges, with indirect resistance a third-party mediates the emergence of partial private transcript and with hidden resistance the private transcript remains hidden. Aboriginal woman also base their resistance on a reciprocal relationship of empowerment between themselves and their communities which becomes more powerful as they age. The increase in the quality of reciprocal community-individual empowerment leads to evolution in resistance strategies, from relatively inefficient emotion-based reactions to more efficient and well-developed strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> The sixteen participants include the eleven original interviewees, the three focus group participants who were not interviewees and the two Elders.

### **Foundations of Everyday Resistance**

The relationship between the women in this study and their communities was critical as the source of strength for women who resisted in this study. Each woman had her own community consisting of an urban-based network of extended family and friends, which sometimes included those living on reserves or First Nations, . Helping themselves and others in this community, especially children and Elders, arose as the primary motivations for resistance. Community-individual empowerment is the cycle in which an individual and their community simultaneously strengthen and support each other. Communities contribute to the personal growth of a woman by helping her to meet her physical and social needs. As individuals experience the personal growth resulting from this empowerment, they develop the capability and desire to give back their communities. The ability to engage in the cycle of community-individual empowerment increased with age.

This study suggests that strategies for resistance evolve and change over time as Aboriginal women grow older and more experienced. Their initial response to dehumanization appears to be emotion-based and impulsive forms of resistance. Young women in particular, reacted to dehumanization with anger and tended to engage in short-term strategies more often than older women. As the participants became parents, their desire to effectively resist for the sake of their children increased. Over time they found that anger was ineffective and developed more useful longer term strategies. This study suggests that older women tended to engage in long-term strategies more often than younger women. As the women became Elders, their response to dehumanization shifted to long-term strategies focused on individual self-help and community advocacy.

This study also demonstrates that in many cases, contact with government agencies is intergenerational in nature. Seven of the eleven original interview participants had children who

were in foster care at some point, and four of these women were themselves removed from their homes as children. Two of these four participants also reported being the second generation in their families who were dependant on social assistance. Several of the participants who experienced intergenerational contact with government agencies reported that their parents involved them in resistance strategies when they were children, or that they, as parents, engaged in resistance acts for the sake of their children.

This study suggests a pattern of reciprocal interrelationship between everyday forms of resistance, the construction of a private transcripts and a cycle of community-individual empowerment, each of which functions to support the other two. The private transcript is constructed from the shared experiences of the community members and contributes to everyday resistance by providing an underlying philosophy which justifies and legitimizes their acts of resistance. The private transcript also expresses the experiences of the group and becomes the basis for community identity based in common experience of oppression. Everyday resistance is the application of private transcript as women act it out, giving it form and substance, thereby making it real. Community-individual empowerment provides the supports, motivation and strength of character necessary to undertake daily acts of resistance. Everyday resistance benefits the individuals' community providing basic needs, challenging dehumanization and possibly making long-term changes.

### **The Need for Further Research**

Aboriginal scholar Kim Anderson (2000) conducted a comparable study on Aboriginal women's individual resistance to negative images of themselves.<sup>2</sup> Anderson found that

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<sup>2</sup> Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Sumach, 2000).

resistance was based on strong families, grounding in the community, connection to land, language, storytelling and spirituality. In particular, she found that strong families, connection to the land and spirituality to be the most significant of these. In my study, family and community are collapsed into the same theme since participants stated that they did not distinguish between their own children and other children in the community.<sup>3</sup> A reciprocal relationship of individual-community empowerment emerged as the most significant dynamic which is comparable to Anderson's findings of the significance to resistance of strong families and grounding in the community. The connection to land, language, storytelling and spirituality described by Anderson did not arise as significant themes in this study.<sup>4</sup>

Although both studies are too small to be considered representative samples<sup>5</sup>, the studies are similar enough that this important difference in findings must be addressed. The most likely explanation is the selection of participants for the studies. Anderson worked for a community agency and became distressed after hearing stories about the abuses experienced by Aboriginal women. She sought out participants who would provide a vision for something better for Aboriginal women. Anderson states: "After listening to the stories of distress, I felt a pressing need to seek out those aunties and grannies who could nurture my sense of hope for Native women." <sup>6</sup> Anderson sought out Elders, community leaders, activists, artists and scholars who she hoped would inspire her and others. Anderson initiated contact with women who met her criteria. The women in this group of exemplars were successful in their areas of expertise,

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>4</sup> Of these themes: land appeared in one interview, language in one, storytelling in none and spirituality in two.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson's study had thirty-nine participants while mine had sixteen.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 14.

displayed strong Aboriginal identities and demonstrated a significant degree of cultural competency.

My study sought out Aboriginal woman willing to share stories about government agencies. There was no other requirement. Of the sixteen participants in the study, only the Elders and two other participants stated that they had been politically active. Of those four, one Elder and one other participant were politically active at the time of the study. Three of the seventeen participants had bachelor degrees and one of these was an artist. None of the women in the study were community leaders. They were all urban Aboriginal women who were, or had at some time been, dependent on government agencies to meet their basic needs.

The difference in the findings of these very similar studies demonstrates the need for more research on the everyday forms of resistance used by Aboriginal women. The need for further research includes studies to determine how resistance is experienced and understood across and between groups of Aboriginal women, what the commonalities and differences are and what factors may play a role in how everyday resistance strategies are informed and enacted. Additionally, research on the everyday resistance of Aboriginal people in general, and other sub-groups such as men, children or two-spirited<sup>7</sup> people is lacking.

Additionally, this study uncovers the need to more thoroughly examine the evolution of resistance strategies over time since many factors, in addition to age and experience, may contribute to changes in patterns of resistance. Similarly, the intergenerational nature of contact with government agencies suggests that resistance strategies themselves may be passed through generations. This needs to be addressed in further depth. Furthermore, the enthusiastic response of the participants in the focus groups to new information regarding their rights indicates the

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<sup>7</sup> Two-spirited people means gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered people.

value of participatory action research—not only did the women respond well to research that tells their stories, they appreciated the reciprocity in the research process, particularly, the information shared with them about the Declaration of Human Rights and the tools used to analyze their data. I have no doubt that participatory action research would be appropriate and well-received.

### **Final Thought**

Katie summed up very succinctly what many of the women told me throughout the course of my research: “We struggle to make it from day to day just to make ends meet and to help each other”.<sup>8</sup> That’s all.

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<sup>8</sup> “Katie,” Interview by author. Digital audio recording. Saskatoon, SK, 18 December 2006.

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APPENDIX A  
CONSENT SCRIPT (ABORIGINAL WOMEN PARTICIPANTS)

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Hidden everyday strategies for resistance to government agency oppression used by Canadian Aboriginal women, 1960-2006”. Please listen carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

**Researcher(s):** Michelle Hogan, Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 717-3156.

**Purpose and Procedure:** This is a study to determine how Aboriginal women understand their resistance to governmental institutions. It will consist of one or two interviews that will take approximately one to one-and-a-half hours and a two hour focus group which will take place on the U of S campus. You will receive a \$20 honorarium for your participation in each interview or focus group.

**Potential Risks:** There are no known risks.

**Potential Benefits:** This research may benefit the Aboriginal community by building an academic understanding of Aboriginal women’s resistance and contributions to cultural persistence. These benefits are not necessarily guaranteed.

**Storage of Data:** I will digitally record the interviews and focus group and transcribe portions of them. I will keep the information for five years.

**Confidentiality:** I will use the data for my Masters thesis and I may use the data for journal articles, conference presentations and other publications. The information from interviews will be confidential. Although I may use direct quotes, I will make up a name to use in my thesis instead of your real name and I will remove any identifying details.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. Although you may give verbal consent for the interviews, you will be asked to sign a consent form for the focus group.

**Consent to Participate:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact me at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on September 27, 2006. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. You may find out about the results of the study by contacting me or my supervisor.

**Questions:** You have heard and understood the description provided above; You have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. You consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that you may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your records.

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(Name of Participant)

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(Date)

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(Signature of Researcher)



## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM (FOCUS GROUP)

You are invited to participate in the focus group for a study entitled “Hidden everyday strategies for resistance to government agency oppression used by Canadian Aboriginal women, 1960-2006”. Please read carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

**Researcher(s):** Michelle Hogan, Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 966-2511 or 717-3156.

**Purpose and Procedure:** This is part of a study to determine how Aboriginal women understand their resistance to governmental institutions. This focus group will take approximately two hours. You will receive a \$20 honorarium for your participation in the focus group.

**Potential Risks:** There are no known risks.

**Potential Benefits:** This research may benefit the Aboriginal community by building an academic understanding of Aboriginal women’s resistance and contributions to cultural persistence. These benefits are not necessarily guaranteed.

**Storage of Data:** I will digitally record the focus group and may transcribe portions of it. I will keep the information for five years.

**Confidentiality:** I will use the data for my Masters thesis and I may use the data for journal articles, conference presentations and other publications. Although I may use direct quotes, I will make up a name to use in my thesis instead of your real name and I will remove any identifying details. The information from this focus group will not be entirely confidential because other participants are present. I would ask that you keep information from this focus group confidential and not discuss it with people outside the group. You need to be aware that some participants may not respect the confidentiality of the group.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request.

**Consent to Participate:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researcher at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on September 27, 2006. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. You may find out about the results of the study by contacting me or my supervisor.

**Questions:** I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

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Name of Participant

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Date

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Signature of Participant

---

Signature of researcher

## APPENDIX C

### CONSENT SCRIPT (ELDERS)

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Hidden everyday strategies for resistance to government agency oppression used by Canadian Aboriginal women, 1960-2006”. Please listen carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

**Researcher(s):** Michelle Hogan, Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 717-3156.

**Purpose and Procedure:** This is a study to determine how Aboriginal women understand their resistance to governmental institutions. It will consist of one interview that will take approximately one to one-and-a-half hours

**Potential Risks:** There are no known risks.

**Potential Benefits:** This research may benefit the Aboriginal community by building an academic understanding of Aboriginal women’s resistance and contributions to cultural persistence. These benefits are not necessarily guaranteed.

**Storage of Data:** I will digitally record the interviews. I will keep the information for five years and then ask you (or your descendents) what you would like done with it after that. I will get your permission before releasing it to anyone except you (or your descendents).

**Confidentiality:** I will use the data for my Masters thesis and I may use the data for journal articles, conference presentations and other publications. I may use direct quotes. The information from this interview will not be confidential.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request.

**Consent to Participate:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on September 27, 2006. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. You may find out about the results of the study by contacting me.

**Questions:** I have heard and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

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(Name of Participant)

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(Date)

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(Signature of Researcher)

APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT POSTER



I am a Native Studies student from the University of Saskatchewan. As part of a research project, I am looking for Aboriginal women who are willing to share stories about their experiences with government agencies that provide housing, justice, education, health and social services.

**If you are an Aboriginal woman willing to share stories about government agencies, please call:**

**Michelle at 717-3156**

Stories will be anonymous and names will be kept confidential.

(\$20 honorarium provided.)

## APPENDIX E

### UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

#### **Preamble**

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore,

The General Assembly,

Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

#### **Article 1**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

#### **Article 2**

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

#### **Article 3**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

#### **Article 4**

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

**Article 5**

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**Article 6**

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

**Article 7**

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

**Article 8**

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

**Article 9**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

**Article 10**

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

**Article 11**

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.
2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

**Article 12**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

**Article 13**

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.
2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

**Article 14**

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Article 15**

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

**Article 16**

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

#### **Article 17**

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

#### **Article 18**

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

#### **Article 19**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

#### **Article 20**

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

#### **Article 21**

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

#### **Article 22**

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

#### **Article 23**

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

#### **Article 24**

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

#### **Article 25**

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary



social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

#### **Article 26**

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

#### **Article 27**

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

#### **Article 28**

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

#### **Article 29**

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

#### **Article 30**

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.